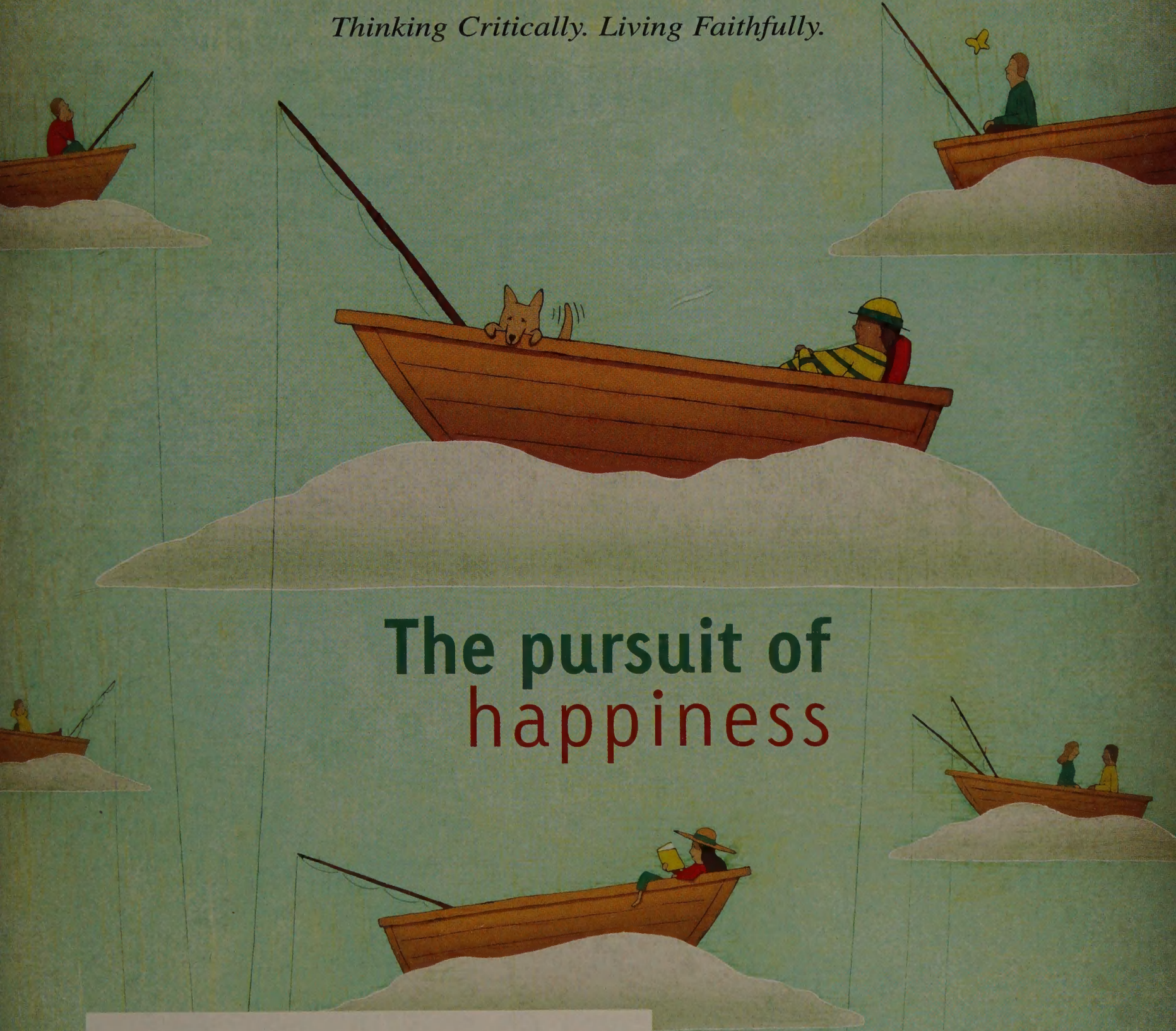


THE Christian CENTURY

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SEARCHABLE ARCHIVES

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Search by Keyword >>

While the CENTURY is no longer publishing an end-of-year index of articles, the new CENTURY website offers something more flexible and powerful: **searchable archives**. Each page includes a search bar in the upper right-hand corner. Search results can be sorted by title, author or date; they can also be filtered by keyword or subject area.

For example, maybe you recall reading an article that discusses creation in terms of all the “stuff” God made, but you can’t remember much more than that. So you **SEARCH** for “stuff.”

The screenshot shows the search results for the keyword "stuff". On the left, there are two filter sections: "FILTER BY SECTION" and "FILTER BY KEYWORDS". The "FILTER BY SECTION" section lists categories like Books (37), Ministry (27), Arts & Culture (20), News (19), Politics & Society (8), Life of Faith (5), and Theology (5). The "FILTER BY KEYWORDS" section lists terms like lectionary (18), ordinary time (9), pastoral ministry (7), congregational life (5), Christian education (4), reading (4), worship (4), christmas (3), compassion (3), and death (3). The main content area shows the search results for "stuff", including a list of articles and a featured article titled "Living in a material world" by Michael Lindvall.

This pulls up a lot of results, so **SORT** them by date to see recent content first.

The screenshot shows the search results for the keyword "stuff", sorted by date. The results are listed in descending order of date, with the most recent article at the top. The featured article "Living in a material world" by Michael Lindvall is still visible. The "SORT BY" dropdown menu is open, showing options like Relevancy, Title, Type, Author, and Date.

Now **FILTER** the results by “theology” to narrow down the list. This pushes the article in question, Michael Lindvall’s “Living in a Material World: God’s Good Stuff,” into the top two items.

The screenshot shows the search results for the keyword "stuff", filtered by the section "Theology". The results are now narrowed down to articles in the theology section. The featured article "Living in a material world" by Michael Lindvall is now at the top of the list. The "FILTER BY SECTION" dropdown menu is open, showing "Theology" as the selected filter.

If you have any questions, contact the CENTURY at main@christiancentury.org.

A stinging critique

IN THE LATE 1970s a colleague handed me a copy of Douglas John Hall's *Lighten Our Darkness: Towards an Indigenous Theology of the Cross*. "I think you'll like this," she said. I didn't so much like it as find myself challenged and stretched by it—as I have been by every book Hall has written and as readers are likely to be by his essay in this issue ("Against religion," p. 30).

Hall was a sharp critic of institutional religion in *Lighten Our Darkness*, and so he remains. What most people hear from the churches, he wrote in 1976, "is a positiveness that is phony and ridiculous: a bright and happy message that has all the depth of a singing commercial." He wrote those words before the emergence of market-based megachurches or the prosperity gospel industry. His critiques sting, but I have always found them to be honest and to spring not from self-righteousness but from a humility grounded in the mystery of God and in a hopeful longing for the church to be the body of Christ on earth, doing the things that Jesus did.

I still turn to *Lighten Our Darkness* for passages like this: "The theology of the Cross declares God is with you—Emmanuel. He is alongside your suffering. He is in the darkest place of your dark night. You do not have to look for him in the sky beyond the stars, in infinite light, in glory unimaginable. He is incarnate. That

means he has been crucified. For to become flesh, to become one of us, means not only to be born but also to die, to fail."

Hall taught theology at McGill University in Montreal for years and obviously loved not only the lonely discipline of the scholarly life but also the daily interchange with students and faculty. Along the way he regularly produced books I have found helpful, including *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* and *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, which he wrote for the National Council of Churches in 1990 and which I pull from my shelf every autumn to be reminded that stewards and stewardship are central biblical motifs. Hall's lifelong emphasis on the mystery of God, on theological modesty and on openness continue to be relevant and a ray of hope.

I have sometimes been disappointed to meet an author in person, but when I met Hall I found him to be charming, modest and full of engaging stories. Over dinner we found out that both our fathers had worked for the railroad. We spent an hour or so swapping stories about fathers who lived by railroad time, marked by a vest-pocket railroad watch. We discovered that when we were boys, both our fathers would show up at least ten minutes early for every event, including dinner—for which he and I were notoriously tardy.

What are **CC** readers buying?

- *Ascension and Ecclesia*, by Douglas Farrow
- Tie-dyed slippers
- Turtle-shaped chocolate molds
- Sleeping pills

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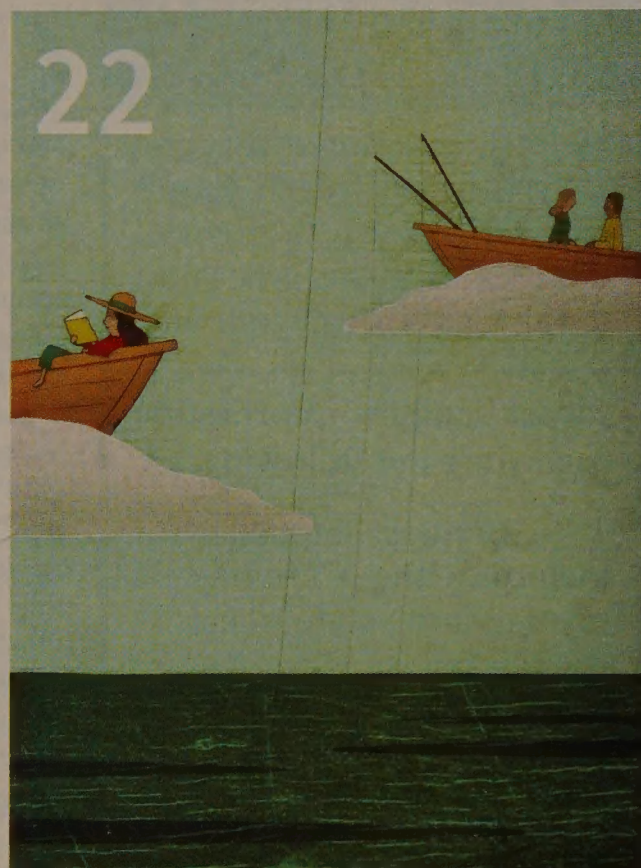
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LETTERS

Paternity issues

Good news and bad news for Miroslav Volf's "God is love" (Nov. 2). To say, "Christians unambiguously and emphatically reject any notion that Jesus Christ . . . is the offspring of a carnal union between God and an object of God's creation" is to ignore the beliefs of a large number of Christians not only today but throughout the last two millennia.

As explained by noted scholar Geza Vermes, in Hebrew or Aramaic "son of God" was always employed as a metaphor for a child of God as we see in Jewish scripture. But in the Greek culture in which Christianity was created, the New Testament expression tended to be understood literally to mean "Son of God," spelled out as it were with a capital letter to indicate one who possessed the same nature as God. In the year 325 the Council of Nicea concluded that Jesus was of the same substance as God. It is necessary to recognize that the theological connotation that surfaced in the New Testament was strikingly different from the reality of Jesus' own time.

*Gordon Clouser
Durango, Colo.*

Miroslav Volf replies:

I am puzzled by the claim that a large number of Christians believe that Jesus was the offspring of a carnal union between God and an object of God's creation. In fact, though I know many Christians, I don't know a single one who believes this. None of the many figures throughout Christian history whose work I have studied believes this either. I don't recall an instance in the Hebrew

scriptures of God having sex and producing offspring (Genesis 6 is not an exception).

Caste and Christianity in India . . .

F. Dean Lueking's article "Faithful Dalits" (Nov. 30) is excellent; however, his reference to "five centuries of Christian presence in India" is a gross understatement that ignores the presence of Christianity in India for well over a thousand years before the arrival of St. Francis Xavier and the Jesuits in the early 16th century. And if legends are accurate, the mission of the apostle Thomas began in the late first century. The strength of Christianity in South India is a testimony to this rich history of Eastern expressions of the faith.

*Paul Barthelemy
Manzanita, Ore.*

Having spent seven years in India, I agree wholeheartedly with the poignant facts of Lueking's article. I write because it is easy for Westerners to see shortcomings in people from other cultures. Americans discriminate on the basis of marriages, economic opportunities and assumptions about others just as those living in India do.

What are our initial thoughts about a person who appears to be Afro-American or Hispanic? Do we take a second look at couples if one member is Caucasian and the other is not? What presumptive judgments do we make about those we meet in regard to their dress, accent, vocabulary or grammar?

The Indians are honest enough to label different groups as castes. We also assign people to groups and subgroups but conceal this discrimination from ourselves by not labeling that inequity and partisanship. Let us not neglect the beams in our own eyes.

*David Barnhouse
Santa Barbara, Calif.*

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January 11, 2011

Spreading lies

At first glance, it seems hyperbolic for the Southern Poverty Law Center to add the Family Research Council and other anti-gay-rights organizations to the list of hate groups it monitors. The label “hate group” evokes the disquieting fringe of virulent bigotry, not highly visible advocacy groups with large constituencies.

But not all hate comes from the fringe. And according to the SPLC—a top authority on hate groups—the term doesn’t necessarily imply violence or illegal activity. Instead, the SPLC defines hate groups as those with “beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics.”

Do the FRC and the other antigay groups qualify? The SPLC makes a persuasive case that they do. An article in *Intelligence Report*, the organization’s magazine, details how these groups trade in “demonizing propaganda” characterized by widely discredited junk science and “repeated, groundless name-calling.” The FRC quickly responded by placing an ad—in the form of an open letter signed by more than two dozen top Republicans—accusing the SPLC of “trying to shut down informed discussion of policy issues.”

The SPLC stresses that its objection to these groups is not that they view homosexuality as unbiblical and sinful. Nor is the SPLC opposed to informed discussion of public policy—quite the opposite. The problem is that these groups deliberately spread misinformation.

The Family Research Council has repeatedly argued that gay men are more likely than others to molest children. Bryan Fischer of the American Family Association has said that Hitler was gay and that homosexuality caused the Holocaust. To call such claims misinformed is being generous—they have been repeatedly and roundly debunked. Disseminating these claims doesn’t promote discussion; it promotes prejudice and hatred.

Neither the Family Research Council nor the American Family Association condones criminal behavior. But by spreading falsehoods and propaganda, such groups lend ideas and credibility to more extremist elements. We live in a time when gays and lesbians are more likely to be victims of a violent hate crime than any other group—more than twice as likely as African Americans. The SPLC has worked tirelessly against hate crimes ever since the term was virtually synonymous with “crimes targeting black people.” It makes sense that the SPLC is now targeting hate crimes against gays.

The SPLC has been clear and consistent as to what it means by hate group. Applying the term to high-profile antigay organizations isn’t just politics. It’s asserting that facts matter, that words have consequences and that hate is hate—regardless of how many people support it.

Not all hate groups are fringe groups.

CENTURY marks

MOURNING INTO DANCING: When Robin Rogers and George Overholser called off their nuptials, they decided they didn't want to waste their \$3,500 deposit for the reception, so they organized a \$100-per-person fund-raiser for the Greenpoint Reformed Church's soup kitchen in New York City and raised \$10,000 for the hungry. "This is a great example of someone turning mourning into dancing," the Greenpoint pastor said (*The Week*, December 17).

POWER OF POETRY: Kim Rosen (author of *Saved by a Poem: The Transformative Power of Words*) visited a safe house in Kenya for young Masai women who had run away from home to escape genital mutilation. The girls liked to sing and asked Rosen if she knew any songs. When Rosen said that what she really likes is poetry, the girls asked her to recite a poem. The first poem to come to Rosen's mind was Mary Oliver's "The Journey," a poem

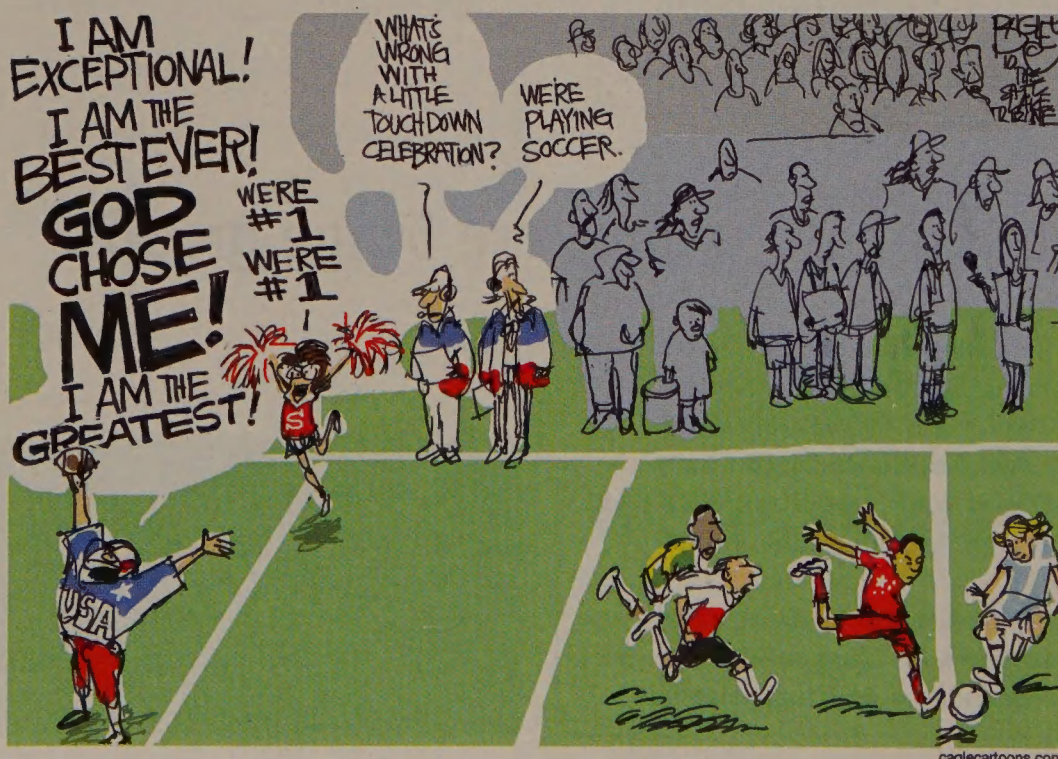
about leaving home, which begins: "One day you finally knew / what you had to do." By the time Rosen was done reciting this poem, she and some of the girls were in tears. One of them asked, "Who is this woman, Mary Oliver? Is she Masai?" (*The Sun*, December).

NOTE THIS: John Kralik's life was falling apart. He was going through a painful second divorce, his girlfriend had left him, his law firm was failing and he was growing apart from his children. One day he decided to focus not on what he didn't have but on what he did have. To express his gratitude, he wrote a handwritten thank-you note each day to someone who had shown him a kindness—a relative, a colleague, a coffee shop barista. Immediately after starting this note-writing, positive developments began to take shape in his life. His book about his experience is *365 Thank Yous: The Year a Simple Act of Daily Gratitude Changed My Life* (*USA Today*, December 8).

WONDER WOMAN: *Glamour* magazine has named Dr. Hawa Abdi woman of the year, saying she is "equal parts Mother Teresa and Rambo." A Somali ob-gyn and lawyer, she runs a 400-bed hospital and helped start a school mostly for girls. Surrounding the hospital are 1,300 acres of farmland that have become a refuge for some 90,000 people displaced by the warring factions in Somalia. A hard-line militia decided last May that a woman couldn't run this operation and ordered her to hand it over to them. She refused, even though her daughter pleaded with her to give in. The militia eventually relented in the face of worldwide outrage, mostly from Somali groups. But before departing the militia wrecked the hospital. Abdi has been in the U.S. raising money to restore the facility (Nicholas D. Kristof in *New York Times*, December 15).

PEACE WEAPON: In his annual message for the World Day of Peace on January 1, Pope Benedict XVI said the freedom to profess and express one's faith is an "authentic weapon of peace" now under threat, especially in Iraq. The pope made special mention of the plight of Iraqi Christians, recalling the October attack on a Catholic cathedral in Baghdad in which dozens of worshipers, including two priests, were killed by gunmen linked to al-Qaeda. Benedict also warned against "more subtle and sophisticated forms of prejudice and hostility" aimed at Christians in the West, especially in an increasingly secular Europe (RNS).

FREE OR DETERMINED: John Horgan, a self-confessed lapsed Catholic turned agnostic and scientific materialist, welcomes scientists who question the existence of God. But he's



concerned about scientists who deny free will. It doesn't make sense, he claims, "to deny that our conscious, psychological deliberations . . . influence our actions." According to Horgan, we need the concept of free will more than we need God as a basis for ethics and morality. He notes an experiment that showed students were more inclined to cheat on a math test and less likely to let a peer use their cell phone after reading a passage challenging the validity of free will (Religion Dispatches).

PROTESTING A MOSQUE: Some Moscovites are upset over the prospect of a new mosque being built in the Russian capital. They claim that the site chosen for construction is not suitable for a large building and want the space turned into a park where "any person, regardless of ethnic, religious, or other background, could relax." The protests about the mosque construction coincided with controversy in Moscow and elsewhere in Russia about the slaughter of lambs as part of the celebration of the Muslim Eid al-Adha feast (ENI).

NEW READERS: India now has the world's largest circulation of daily newspapers. A recent survey determined that the country has 83 million readers between the ages of 13 and 35. The demand for print material has created a burgeoning pulp fiction industry that produces novels that appeal to young adults aspiring to better their economic status. An example: *Stilettoes in the Newsroom*, a semiautobiographical novel written in English by an Indian journalist, in which each chapter ends with a lesson, such as: "Office romance can be fun . . . only if done with the right people!" (*Christian Science Monitor*, December 13).

TRACKING JESUS: Some churches with public nativity displays have had problems with vandalism. Stealing baby Jesus is a common prank. A security company has come to the rescue. It plants a GPS device in the nativity items so that the stolen objects can be tracked. One church reported that by publicizing its use of the tracking devices it had stopped the vandalism

"You've got to stop this war in Afghanistan."

— Richard Holbrooke's final words to his Pakistani surgeon before surgery to repair a torn aorta. Holbrooke, President Obama's chief envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, died last month while in surgery (*Washington Post*, December 14).

"As a self-respecting democratic nation, we need to stop being the world's largest exporter of arms and munitions and quit educating Third World militaries in the techniques of torture, military coups, and service as proxies for our imperialism."

— Chalmers Johnson, author of a trilogy on American militarism and imperialism, who died in November (TomDispatch.com, December 2)

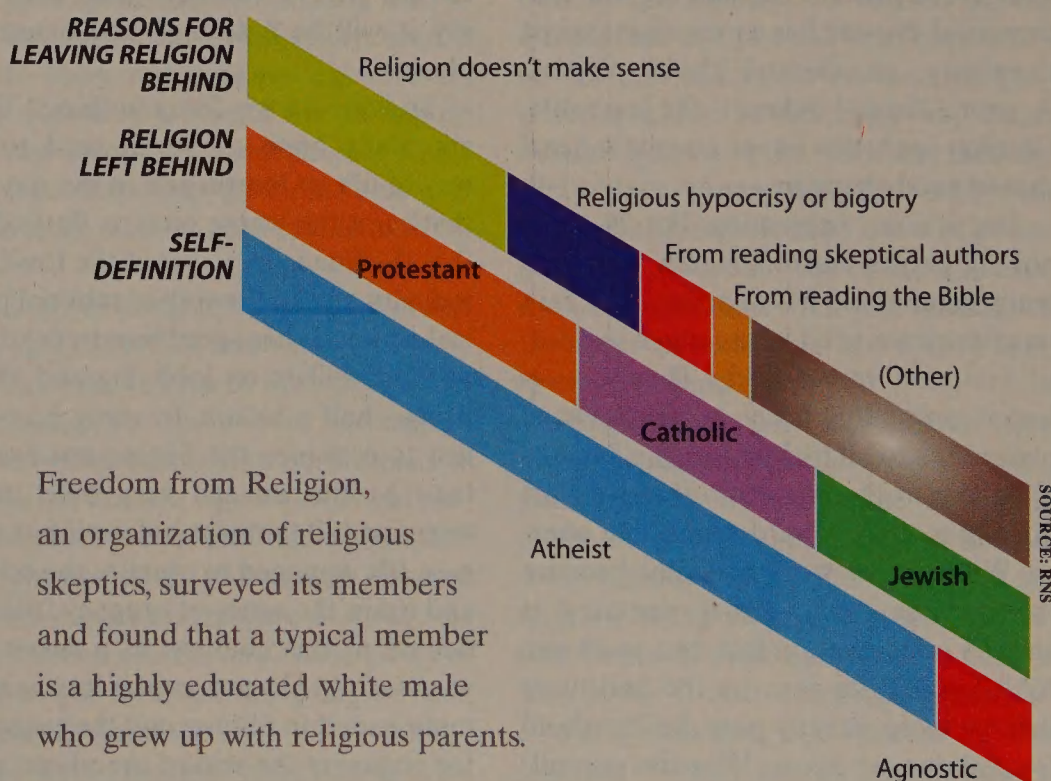
and stealing. The company, BrickHouse Security, is also donating its services to churches, synagogues and schools for displays other than nativity scenes (SFGate.com, December 2).

NONE OF THE ABOVE: Conservative Christians may have a plethora of presidential candidates appealing to them for their votes in 2012, but many of the prominent figures have liabilities in the eyes of this constituency. Sarah Palin is seen by many as unelectable. Mitt Romney is a Mormon, which is anathe-

ma for many evangelicals. Newt Gingrich has a marriage problem—two ex-wives. And while Mike Huckabee is a pastor who speaks the language of "values voters," some believe that he failed to make the most of the popular support he had in 2008 (*Newsweek*, December 20).

NO SURPRISE? We Can Know, a Christian group based in Raleigh, North Carolina, believes that Jesus will return in May. Using an analysis of scripture, particularly biblical genealogies, it has designated May 21 as the day (AP).

RELIGIOUS SKEPTICS



Disobedience

by Bill McKibben

IF THERE WAS EVER an issue about which civil disobedience should not be required, global warming is it.

It's not like the civil rights movement, in which protesters had to break through encrusted millennia of ugly habit, making the kind of dramatic and courageous stand that forced the rest of the nation to see them as real, vital, equal. Seeing black southerners set on by dogs, tossed sideways by fire hoses—somehow it managed finally to get across the notion that these were people. It made sense that preachers were at the head of the fight: this was a moral issue ultimately—the moral issue.

By contrast, global warming is, or should be, dry science, an entirely rational question that should be addressed by economists, engineers, scientists working on our behalf and with our thanks; a democratic process, difficult but not controversial. No one has a prejudice against chemistry, an animus about physics. A moral issue? Almost the opposite. Opinion isn't the issue; no one's heart should need changing.

But it's not happening. For 20 years now scientists and engineers and even many economists have spoken with rare unanimity: we need to use much less fossil fuel, and very quickly. They've coalesced around a fairly straightforward plan: make fossil fuel pay for the damage it's doing to the planet, so that we start quickly to shift toward renewable energy. We have to work speedily, because the damage from global warming is already under way; in fact, two years ago NASA scientists gave us the bad news that we were already past the threshold for real danger: above 350 parts per million CO₂ in the atmosphere, they warned,

we were in serious trouble from flood, fire, melt. We're at 390 ppm now and rising two parts per million per year, which is precisely why we're suffering through summers like 2010: 19 nations set new temperature records, drought devastated Russia and convinced the Kremlin to end all grain exports; record rainfalls put 7 million Pakistanis out of their homes. Global warming is under way, and unless

making halting progress on their own—the Chinese, for instance, though building coal-fired power plants, are also by some counts investing \$700 billion in renewable energy programs; when 250 million Chinese take a shower now, the hot water comes from solar panels on their roofs.)

We've made the science of climate one more political football—just another

Civil disobedience may be necessary to show the urgency of addressing global warming.

we act very quickly the damage will get far worse; on its current path, our atmosphere will hold nearly 1,000 parts per million CO₂ by century's end. That is to say, it will be a strange and dangerous place.

So why are we doing nothing? There are many answers. We're used to our way of life, so inertia gets in the way. But that's not the whole picture. Part of it is that the financial power of the fossil fuel industry gets in the way of rational political action. It has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on lobbying and advertising—half a billion, by some accounts, just to convince the Senate not even to take a vote on the very mild global warming bill that was before it last summer. It's managed to obscure the science and drain the sense of urgency from the debate in this country; as a result, last year's Copenhagen conference on climate ended in failure, and the prospects for engaging the rest of the planet grow ever dimmer. (Happily, some nations are

issue we square off over, as if physics was simply one more interest group. As things stand, we are nowhere near taking the decisive action that might give us a chance of avoiding the most devastating kinds of warming; as coral bleaches, deserts grow and ice sheets melt across the planet, we're just marking time.

Which is why some of us have been thinking it may be necessary to mount a campaign of mass action, of civil protest, of dignified disobedience. Its goal would not be to shut down the fossil fuel system—that system is much too big and too pervasive to be shut down, since it powers every action we take from the moment we wake up. The campaign's aim, instead,

*Bill McKibben is the founder of 350.org and the author of *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (Times Books). More information on taking action on global warming can be found at climatedirectaction.org.*

would be much simpler: to demonstrate the sense of urgency that this issue requires. It would be in the nature of a witness.

Exactly where that witness makes most sense is an open question. Perhaps outside a few of the coal-fired power plants that spew the most carbon into the atmosphere—plants we no longer need, save to bolster the profits of the utilities that own them. Perhaps outside the headquarters of the fossil fuel billionaires that fund the cynical disinformation campaigns. (For instance, Charles and David Koch, brothers at the helm of an enormous energy empire, have become the bankroll for every organization fighting legislation on climate change, as Jane Mayer demonstrated in the *New Yorker* earlier this year.) Perhaps outside the offices of those congresspeople who have done the most to block progress.

The where is less important for the moment than the how. Civil disobedience is a tactic that's in decline, because we've forgotten certain truths about how to use it honestly and effectively. Maybe the most important of these is: it's a last resort, a step we use when other avenues are exhausted.

I've been writing and speaking about climate change for a quarter century; I've watched as endless panels of eminent scientists have gone before Congress to tell the truth about what's happening to the planet. At 350.org we've organized the most widespread days of political action in the planet's history. This past October we had 7,400 "work parties" in 188 nations, where people put up solar panels and laid out bike paths—and implored their leaders to get to work too. A coalition of American environmental groups last year proposed a mild and tame climate bill—a baby step in the direction we need to travel. They lobbied for it ceaselessly, but in the tidal wave of fossil fuel money, a cowardly Senate refused even to take a vote on the bill. I think we're justified to press our cause in new ways.

But we're not justified in doing it carelessly. Advocates like Thomas Friedman and Al Gore have called for students to stage sit-ins outside power plants, and I appreciate their urgency. But I don't think

college kids should be the cannon fodder this time around. For one thing, it's not really their fault, not yet: it's those of us who have spent decades pouring carbon into the atmosphere who really need a way to show our remorse. In an ever-tougher economy, it's not fair to impose an arrest record on someone who hasn't even landed his first job; those of us with a little more security need to lead the way.

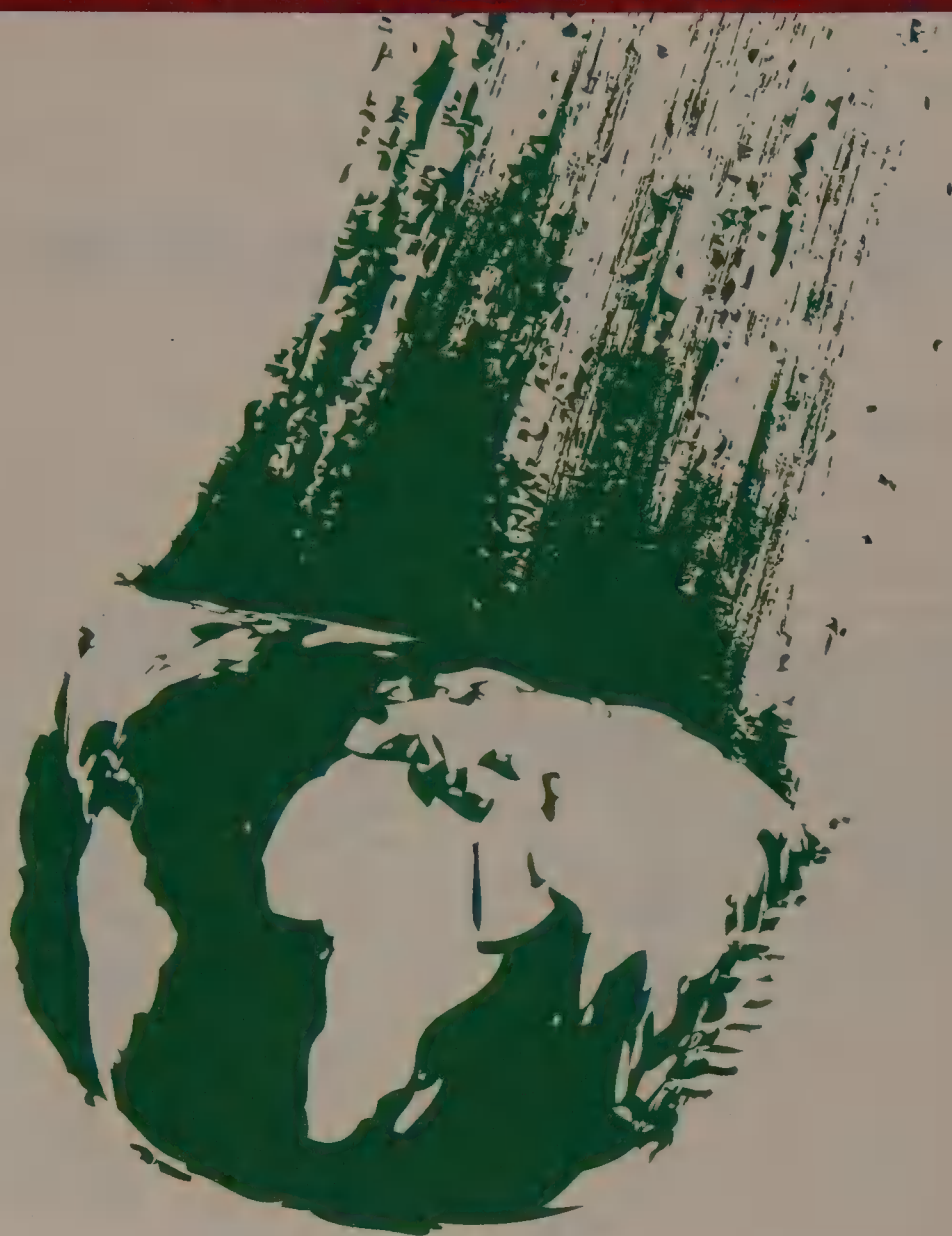
So if I'm going to be involved in this kind of battle, I know who I want by my side, at least at first: those of us born in, say, the Eisenhower administration or before. Many of us participated or watched as the civil rights movement pioneered these tactics and understand that their power derives in no small measure from the dignity that marked those events. I don't wear a necktie very often, but if I'm going to get arrested, I'm going to have mine neatly knotted.

The lesson we need above all to communicate is this: people asking for action

on climate change are not radicals. Just the opposite—they're in some sense deep conservatives. What's radical is to double the amount of carbon in the atmosphere and just see what happens—no one, not Marx or Mao, has ever proposed a change as radical as that. Those radicals backed by the fossil fuel industry flirt with destroying the planet's physical systems, and they do it so a few of us can keep our particular way of life a decade or two longer; that's not just radical, it's so deeply irresponsible that there's really no precedent.

Having been given this earth to keep and protect—dominion over a living planet—we're on the verge of wiping away much of creation. In the process we're already making life impossible for millions of our poorest brothers and sisters. This is not just radical, it's a kind of blasphemy. Global warming shouldn't be a moral question, but because of our inaction it's become the greatest moral challenge of our time.

CC



The 400th anniversary

The KJV endureth

by Timothy Larsen

THE KING JAMES Version—which marks its 400th birthday in 2011—was the Bible of my childhood. It was well past the halfway mark of its fourth century by that time. In other words, it has had quite an extraordinary run. For many people it is still the only translation they use of the most important book in their lives. Once its resonant words get into your blood they are there for life. This has often made people very reluctant to set it aside for something new.

The first major attempt to replace it was the Revised Version, which appeared for both testaments in 1885. It was so deferential to the KJV that the translators proudly declared in the preface that they had sometimes chosen to retain archaic words, occasionally even ones that were admittedly incomprehensible. Nevertheless, the mild tinkering that they did aroused passionate consternation. People apparently really were outraged that the “thief” on the cross was now a “robber.” From a later perspective, however, the RV was deemed inadequate more for being too cautious than too cavalier. It simply would not do to present the word of God to the masses in an unintelligible vocabulary.

A year or so ago I heard a rebroadcast of a radio Christmas special that Bing Crosby had done in the mid-20th century. He read the story of the nativity from Luke 2 in the KJV. This is a text that runs deep in my veins, since at my private, Christian elementary school we were required to recite it from memory on an annual basis. Miss Dys emphasized that our faces should become suitably animated with awe when we declaimed that the shepherds were “sore afraid.”

Crosby (or one of his scriptwriters) found this phrase baffling and assumed that his listeners would as well. Guessing at its meaning, he ended up inverting it, and thus the crooner informed listeners in his smooth, well-modulated tones that the shepherds “were not afraid.”

Even when the words themselves are clear, they might not convey quite the same impression over time. I spent much of my childhood assuming that “study to shew thyself approved unto God” (2 Tim.

I moved to the leafy western suburbs of Chicago at a time when tearing down a perfectly good, commodious house to build a McMansion on the same lot was all the rage. It was therefore haunting to hear the prophet inquire, “Why are you living in luxurious houses . . . ?” (Hag. 1:3 NLT). This question packed a lot more punch than the KJV’s rather cryptic “Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses . . . ?” (I had to look up *cieled* in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. It help-

Rather than being distracted by the KJV’s archaic vocabulary, I was drawn in by its haunting power.

2:15) meant that whether or not I received divine favor hinged upon how diligently I mastered the times tables.

Abandoning obscurity for accessibility, I therefore gleefully switched to the New International Version when I was 13 years old. The ongoing work of its translators (who have another revision coming out in 2011 in honor of their KJV predecessors) has been my default Bible ever since. However, I have also worked my way through a handful of other modern translations, including the New Living Translation. Perhaps playfully evoking the ghost of “study to shew thyself,” I still have posted in front of my computer screen the NLT’s blunt version of the advice given in 2 Thessalonians 3:12: “Settle down and get to work.” (This imperative snaps me to attention much more effectively than the KJV’s parallel admonition “that with quietness they work.”)

fully offers *wainscoted* as a suitable synonym.)

In preparation for the KJV’s 400th anniversary I decided to reread the translation so familiar from my youth. I found its power and grandeur unabated, though some of the language has an odd ring today—at least after my long sojourn in 20th-century iterations of these divinely inspired texts.

One particularly jarring element is a whole cluster of terms that sound like medievalisms. It makes one seasick to think about how anachronistic it was to import these terms back into biblical times and about how archaic they are for readers today, especially in America. For

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example, there are various references to castles (2 Chron. 17:12).

Then there are the aristocratic titles. The descendants of Esau, for instance, are given the rank of “dukes” (Gen. 36:15). One wonders if these are merely courtesy titles—and whether or not they could be found in *Debrett’s Peerage*. Although sounding like a caricature of medieval times in a “Ye Olde Cheese Shoppe” sort of way, a woman might be described as a “damsel” or even, alas, a “wench” (2 Sam. 17:17). Ruth is a damsel—and suitably in distress (Ruth 2:5–6). Evoking fantasy role-playing games today, the natural world of the KJV includes unicorns (Job 39:9) and dragons (Ps. 148:7).

What is far more eerie, however, is the ways in which the vocabulary of the KJV seems to reach into our 21st-century world. Dwelling in suburban Chicago, I was disconcerted to learn that *suburbs* is a KJV word (Num. 35:2). Our suburban life also leaps out in other ways. Jesus accuses the money changers of making the temple into a “house of merchandise”—which sounds uncannily plausible for the name of a big-box chain store. House of Merchandise—were it to exist—would no doubt know how to “advertise” (Num. 24:14). Our cieleed houses are, of course, heavily “mortgaged” (Neh. 5:3). And the apostles, like all the rest of us, spend their time “in conference” (Gal. 2:6).

Gen Xers like myself may be amused to know that Joshua more or less calls the Israelites slackers (Josh. 18:3). A famous member of our generational cohort, Keanu Reeves, might be interested to learn that the futuristic sounding phrase “the matrix” is already there in the KJV (Exod. 13:12). Another case of so-out-it’s-in is “firkin” as a unit of liquid measurement (John 2:6), which is now dotted about our contiguous towns in the name of a chain of would-be trendy pubs. This is particularly fitting as the KJV Jesus is a friend of “publicans” (Matt. 11:19)—a category of acquaintances that drops out of recent translations.

My own location does not lend itself to noticing urban connections, but it was bracing to observe that what is sometimes decried as nonstandard speech has

the imprimatur of the King’s English—for example, grammatical constructions such as “we be” (John 8:33) and, from the mouth of our Lord himself, “they be” (Matt. 15:14). And a variant on at least one current vulgar term is fully authorized: as a kind of antieuphemism, sticking close to the original Hebrew, a common KJV term for men is “any that pisseth against the wall” (1 Sam. 25:22).

None of this, however, comes close to expressing my primary reactions while rereading the KJV. Far more often than being distracted by the vocabulary, I was drawn in by its haunting power. The majesty of the KJV’s language has been celebrated often—and by the pens of writers more ready than I. Not least in the 400th anniversary year of 2011, however, everyone whose mother tongue is English ought to do so again.

It is hard for me to disentangle the familiarity of texts cherished in childhood from an objective assessment of the 17th-century translators’ skills, but I suspect that as long as the words of the most familiar passages in Shakespeare’s plays still have a unique capacity to

speak to us, so will the language of the KJV for Psalm 23, the Sermon on the Mount, Ecclesiastes 3, Genesis 1, 1 Corinthians 13, John 1 and much more. Biblical scholarship and the English language have moved on considerably since 1611, so I would certainly not counsel anyone today to live by the KJV alone. On the other hand, to those who have never encountered it, I extend an invitation to taste and see that it is good.

A living language is continually altering, and so translations must change as well. Ultimately, the resonant impact encountered in a biblical text in English is not the work of the translators, however felicitous, but rather the mark of a quality inherent in the source itself. Like a personally shallow actor articulating the prose of a profound playwright, even an inelegant rendering of the Bible carries the life-changing power of the Spirit of the Living God. Translations fade, but the scriptures themselves are incorruptible seed. “For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the LORD endureth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:24–25 KJV). CC

At this age

Dark as birds, the kind
sober young men come
quickly when you go down

on the ice, rush to see
for themselves
whether you rise

broken or whole, forever
changed or unfazed
by such a fall, the world

or at least the axel
it spins on all unspun
and you the mistress

of the moment, the ice
as apt as any metaphor
for death

Mary M. Brown

Shaky economy imperils church pensions

Religious denominations have long provided retired clergy and staff with secure pension payments—more secure, in some cases, than corporate retirement plans. But some recent developments have drawn attention to the vulnerabilities of so-called church plans, which are exempt from federal regulations aimed at safeguarding retirement funds for private-sector retirees.

As cash-strapped states and private companies revamp, freeze or end their pension programs altogether, participants in church plans are now realizing that such plans can be riskier than they appear, observers say.

“As a group, employees in so-called church plans are far more at risk than other private sector employees,” said Karen Ferguson, director of the Pension Rights Center, a Washington-based watchdog group.

Unlike other private-sector workers whose pensions are insured by the federal Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, church employees have no federal agency poised to rescue their employer-provided pensions in the event of a devastating market crash. Yet “because there hasn’t been a collapse of a [church] pension board plan, everybody, I think, is comfortable leaving them alone,” Ferguson said. In several recent cases, however, churches have failed to keep their plans fully funded to be able to meet obligations to retirees:

- In October, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Wilmington (Delaware) said it had only \$8.5 million available to pay \$52 million in pension liabilities. The diocese, which is under Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection because of the clergy sexual abuse scandal, is assuring pensioners that it will meet its obligations.

- In August, the Archdiocese of

Boston informed employees that their pension plan—funded at just 79 percent—is “unsustainable.” The archdiocese will keep paying its obligations, according to spokesman Terrence Donilon, but a new market-based plan involving 401(k) or 403b accounts will take effect January 1, 2012, funded through individual and employer contributions.

- About 12,000 Lutherans are seeing their pension payments shrink by 6 to 9 percent annually from 2010 through 2012. The defined benefit program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was only 61 percent funded in February 2009 and has been closed to new participants since January 1, 2010.

Other major denominations are reporting no such problems with their benefit plans. Several mainline denominations still offer defined benefit programs—increasingly rare in the private sector—which promise to pay retirees a fixed monthly sum based on a formula.

Defined benefit plans of the Episco-

pal Church (\$8.5 billion), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (\$6.2 billion) and the United Methodist Church (\$6.2 billion) are all sufficiently funded to meet future obligations, according to church spokespeople. Those three denominational pension funds rank among the nation’s largest, each of them more than twice the size of Vermont’s \$2.9 billion state pension fund, for example.

Unconvinced that they should follow the lead of corporate America and offer more plans like a 401(k), the organizations overseeing these assets remain committed to offering defined benefits.

“We maintain a prudent, long-term, disciplined and measured investment strategy, and remain convinced that this approach is the most prudent for achieving positive long-term investment results,” said Colette Nies, spokeswoman for the United Methodist Church’s General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, in an e-mail.

Observers cautioned church pension-

HEALTHY MAINLINE PENSION PLANS



The defined benefit plans of the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Methodist Church are all regarded as sufficiently funded to meet future obligations—even ranking among the nation’s largest (and considerably larger than the pension fund for the state of Vermont).

ers not to get lulled into a false sense of security.

"The church world tended to be a place that wanted, in the case of clergy, to protect those people from ordination to grave," said David Powell, a Washington attorney and church pension expert who's written the only book on the subject. "They wanted to make those sorts of pension promises. It's the affordability of them that has got many of them concerned now."

Powell said some denominations are considering switching from defined benefits to less-expensive defined contribution plans, such as those used by the ELCA and the American Baptist Churches USA. In the meantime, however, their assurances of sufficient funding don't necessarily mean much in Powell's view.

"A lot of this is rather fuzzy accounting," Powell said. "You're really trying to guess: how much money do I need now in order to pay Joe Blow \$110 per month, commencing in 2030? . . . Actuaries will give you different assumptions, and it can vary very widely."

Pension concerns have been brewing in some denominations since before stock markets crashed in 2008. The ELCA, for instance, is battling a lawsuit from retirees of its publishing arm, Augsburg Fortress. At a December 8 federal court hearing in Minneapolis, lawyers sparred over whether the ELCA owes a debt to Augsburg Fortress pensioners, whose plan was dissolved a year ago after years of underfunding. A ruling on preliminary questions is expected in early 2011.

Church plans could qualify for federal insurance if they were to comply voluntarily with associated federal regulations, according to Pension Rights Center spokeswoman Nancy Hwa. But few if any have taken that step.

The PRC's Ferguson said pension funds of major denominations are managed professionally, and she has no reason to think they might be in trouble. But because church plans don't have to disclose their funding levels to the public, a funding crisis could potentially go undetected.

"Most people don't realize there's a problem" until they discover that their pensions are in jeopardy, Ferguson said.

"They don't know their plans are not protected by the law. . . . You assume everything is going to be all right, especially if you're in a religious organization. You assume that the church is going to look out for you."

Denominational pension boards send out annual reports to the likes of Les Pettit, a disabled 67-year-old United Methodist minister who retired in Berwick, Maine, two years ago after 25 years in parish ministry. To him, the annual report isn't very illuminating.

"You'd have to be an accountant to understand it," Pettit said, adding that he has "great confidence" in those overseeing his pension funds but admits he's taking their word for it. "It's fine as far as I know now, but who knows?" Pettit said. "You put your trust in [managers and administrators]. Then you hope and pray they're as honest as they claim to be."

—G. Jeffrey MacDonald, RNS

As polls show doubt, Obama underscores Christian identity

When President Obama lit the National Christmas Tree behind the White House in the 2009 ceremony, he spoke of a "child born far from home" and said "while this story may be a Christian one, its lesson is universal."

This last December, Obama referred to that same "child born far from home" but added a more personal twist: "It's a story that's dear to Michelle and me as Christians." Three days later, at a Christmas benefit concert, the president again talked about how the story of Christmas "guides my Christian faith."

What changed? For one, three separate polls in the past year have found that one in four Americans think the president is a Muslim, 43 percent don't know what faith he follows, and four in ten Protestant pastors don't consider Obama a Christian.

Stephen Mansfield, author of *The Faith of Barack Obama*, said the polls "had to be a wake-up call to the White House."



RNS / CHUCK KENNEDY / WHITE HOUSE

FAITH IN VIEW: President Obama, with mother-in-law Marian Robinson, daughters Sasha and Malia and First Lady Michelle Obama, light the National Christmas Tree during a ceremony in the Ellipse in Washington on December 9.

Though Obama has spoken of his faith numerous times, saying he prays daily and talking at Easter about how "as Christians, we believe that redemption can be delivered by faith in Jesus Christ," his most recent words about his faith are even more open, more personal.

"I think he's just bringing more of himself to the game, so to speak," said Mansfield. "It's not as though he's changed religions or something. He's just being open about it."

The White House, which declined to comment on the president's recent choice of words, has called him a man of "strong Christian faith" in the past. Nonetheless, White House observers noticed a marked change in tone.

"The president understands that he needs to continually tell his own personal spiritual story," said Shaun Casey, professor of Christian ethics at Washington's Wesley Theological Seminary, who served as an Obama campaign adviser. "He did that masterfully in the campaign, and I think you're seeing a return to that voice."

Timothy Sherratt, professor of political science at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts, said lingering questions about Obama's faith, as reflected in the polls, probably played a role in his latest phraseology.

"Some of that, one would think, has to be in the back of his mind," said Sherratt, who taught a class this semester in political communication at the evangelical college. "Where there's ambiguity, it's always tempting to bring more clarity." —Adelle M. Banks, RNS

Mary appeared thrice in Wisconsin, bishop says

In 1859, a Wisconsin farm woman recounted three mystical meetings with the Virgin Mary, who told her to pray for the conversion of sinners and teach children the Catholic faith.

More than 150 years later—December 8, to be exact—the Catholic bishop of Green Bay sanctioned Adele Brise's visions as both supernatural and "worthy of belief." It was the first officially approved Marian apparition (the Catholic Church's term for paranormal appearances by Mary) in the United States.

Of the many questions kindled by Bishop David Ricken's announcement, two seemed particularly apt: How does the church investigate mystical visions? And why does it take so long to approve them?

Brise was 28, partially blind and far from her native Belgium when she reported speaking with a woman wearing a brilliant white gown and starry crown who seemed to float above the fields.

Calling herself "the Queen of Heaven," the vision gave Brise a mission: "Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation." For the rest of her life, Brise did just that, trudging across the untamed frontier to catechize children, build a school and found an order of Franciscan sisters.

Since Brise's visions, tales of miraculous healings attributed to Mary have become commonplace in Champion, Wisconsin, where crutches and other tokens of cured injuries fill a shrine built on the site of the apparition, said deacon Ray DuBois, a spokesman for the Diocese of Green Bay.

Ricken opened a formal investigation into Brise's visions in January 2009, appointing a committee of three Marian experts who followed guidelines issued by the Vatican in 1978 for judging apparitions and revelations. These committees typically consult experts in psychology, church law, scripture, history and theology, as well as take testimony from people familiar with the visionary.



VIRGIN VISIT: *The Roman Catholic Diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin, has approved as authentic an apparition of the Virgin Mary to Adele Brise in 1859—the first officially approved Marian apparition in the U.S. Brise later founded an order of Franciscan sisters.*

In general, church investigators are more "history detectives" than "ghost hunters," to use a television analogy. Supernatural events are almost impossible to prove, said Johann Roten, a priest who has served on committees assessing apparitions, so the church is more interested in the consequences of the vision.

"It's not only the moment of seeing Our Lady that is important to determining whether a vision is true, but also what the seer actually does with that experience," said Roten, director of the International Marian Research Institute at the University of Dayton in Ohio.

The Vatican guidelines require an investigation into visionaries' moral and mental character—crackpots, degenerates and money-grubbers need not apply. Extra points are given for visions that inspire abundant "spiritual fruits," such as works of charity, intense prayer or conversion. Alleged apparitions that encourage disobedience toward the church or its doctrines are dismissed.

Bishops have the authority to approve apparitions in their diocese, though occasionally national bishops' conferences or the Vatican will step in if there is a dispute, such as the ongoing one in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Thus far, the church has approved only about 12 Marian apparitions worldwide, said Roten, with Lourdes, France, and Fatima, Portugal, among the most famous. Others—including some in the U.S.—are under investigation, Roten said, but he declined to name them. "You don't want to start publicizing things because you are not sure they will go anywhere," said Roten.

Alleged apparitions in Bayside, New York; Emmitsburg, Maryland; and Marlboro Township, New Jersey, were investigated and declared false by the church.

In the 1950s, a farmwife's visions of Mary in Necedah, Wisconsin, about 150 miles southeast of Champion, attracted one of the largest religious gatherings in the state's history, said Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, a scholar at the University of Kansas. The church, however, dismissed the Necedah apparitions.

In general, the Catholic Church approaches stories of supernatural visions with a mixture of excitement and caution, scholars say.

On the one hand, mystical experiences can inspire believers and spark vast spiritual movements, such as in Mexico after the Virgin of Guadalupe reportedly appeared to peasant Juan Diego in 1531. Millions of pilgrims—particularly Catholics—trek to Lourdes and Fatima each year.

But Catholic leaders are also wary of hoaxes, ridicule and diviners who boast of a hotline to God. Hundreds of visions—from spotting Jesus in a grilled cheese sandwich, to weeping statues, to more sustained spiritual experiences—have been reported and dismissed over the centuries.

"I think the church quite properly plays a waiting game," said Brian Britt, a professor of religious studies at Virginia Tech University. He compared the long lag time in approving apparitions to the church's lengthy process for canonizing saints. "Better late than wrong" is the prevailing ethos.

"Once the visionary is dead and gone, if the pilgrimage site continues to have meaning and value for the church, it becomes less risky," Britt said, "and even sometimes desirable for the church to offer its endorsement." —RNS

Geneva-based ENInews suspends operation

Faced with a 50 percent cut in funding in 2011 from the World Council of Churches, the Geneva-based ENInews suspended its five-days-a-week news service on December 21.

The award-winning news agency, also known as Ecumenical News International, drew its main support from the WCC, although sponsoring groups included the Lutheran World Federation and the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

The news service—not a public relations arm for the church organizations—was widely respected for its editorial independence and integrity.

Its network of 50 correspondents worldwide were told December 15 by editor-in-chief Peter Kenny that he and managing editor Stephen Brown and other staffers in Geneva will end their jobs before Christmas. Financial constraints made it “impossible for the agency to continue as it has done in the past,” Kenny said.

The news service, which was launched in 1994, learned on May 6 of WCC’s cutback in 2011 funds. Two days later in Washington, D.C., ENInews was honored by the Associated Church Press as the best news agency covering religion as well as winning other awards.

Plans to restart a “restructured” ENI operation in January were not immediately detailed.

The president of ENInews, Anders Gadegaard, dean of the Copenhagen (Lutheran) Cathedral, registered his disappointment in submitting his resignation on December 8.

“I do not wish to take responsibility for a restructuring process without ensuring that the experiences and achievements of the past are brought forward into the new structures,” said Gadegaard. “Transformation and renewal should always build on the achievements of the past. To begin once again from zero is a waste of investments, resources and great human qualifications.” —John Dart

Study: Congregants happier with good friends in pews

CLOSE FRIENDSHIPS among churchgoers, rather than theology, seem to be the key to happiness among religious people, according to a new study.

One-third of Americans who attend religious services weekly and have three to five close friends in the congregation said they are “extremely satisfied” with their lives. In comparison, only one in five Americans who attend services weekly but have no close friends in the congregation say they are extremely satisfied.

“In short, ‘sitting alone in the pew’ does not enhance one’s life satisfaction,” conclude authors Chaeyoon Lim of the University of Wisconsin-

Madison and Robert D. Putnam of Harvard University in a December article in *American Sociological Review*.

“Only when one forms social networks in a congregation does religious service attendance lead to a higher level of life satisfaction.”

Researchers found that 23 percent of people who attend religious services several times a year and have three to five close friends in the congregation are extremely satisfied. About a fifth of people who never attend services also say they are extremely satisfied with their lives.

The findings are based on the Faith Matters Survey of U.S. adults. —RNS

Catholic school enrollment moves steadily downward

Not much keeps New Orleans Archbishop Gregory Aymond up at night. But one thing does make him toss and turn.

In the past four years, especially after Hurricane Katrina, Catholic school enrollment has been steadily falling. Finding ways to reverse the trend has been the most challenging work of his administration. “There is a decline and there has been a decline for the last several years, nationally as well as locally,” Aymond said.

Catholic schools took a hit from Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and have continued losing students since, with enrollment dropping almost 5 percent since 2007, from 40,625 to 38,434. It’s down 19 percent from pre-Katrina levels, and there are 20 fewer schools.

Nationally, Catholic school enrollment has shrunk 20 percent over the past decade, from 2.6 million to 2.1 million students, according to the National Catholic Educational Association. More than 1,600 schools have closed or consolidated, with elementary schools taking the biggest hit.

In November, the Archdiocese of New

York proposed shuttering 32 schools in what church officials described as the largest reorganization in that school system’s history. In Baltimore, 13 parochial schools are set to close.

“It’s significant, and it’s disturbing,” said Sister Dale McDonald, the national association’s public policy director. “We’re talking about a half million students.”

The reasons for the decline, both nationally and locally, are numerous. Families are smaller, tuition is higher and public charter and magnet schools are more popular than ever.

The trend is especially surprising in the New Orleans area, where the percentage of students attending nonpublic schools has historically been one of the highest in the United States.

Linda Kleinschmidt of Metairie enrolled her daughter, Eva, in the coed Haynes Academy for Advanced Studies magnet school—the state’s second-ranked public high school—over the all-girls St. Mary’s Dominican High School. “It was not a matter of money,” Kleinschmidt said. “It was more a difference in the social and academic environment that single-sex schools cannot offer. We are happy so far with the decision.”

Ben Kleban, founder and director of New Orleans College Prep charter school,



DROPPING NUMBERS: Catholic officials are worried about declining enrollment at Catholic schools such as the one pictured here: Our Lady of Divine Providence School in Metairie, Louisiana.

said that while most of his students come from other public schools, he's seeing a rise in applicants coming from Catholic schools. "I'm hearing more and more from parents that it doesn't make sense for them to pay tuition if we can provide as good or better education than what they are getting at a parochial school," Kleban said.

Lynn Jenkins, admissions director at Benjamin Franklin High School, Louisiana's top public high school, said the number of new students from Catholic schools rose from 29 to 46 this year. Such switches are becoming increasingly common. "Charter and magnet schools have definitely affected our enrollment, and we know that," Aymond said.

While specialized public schools offer a good education, Aymond thinks families are leaving Catholic schools for economic reasons: the average tuition for elementary school is \$3,400 a year; for high school, \$8,000. "Catholic education is expensive," Aymond said. "We not only provide excellent [secular] education but we provide excellence in the teaching of the Catholic faith. It worries me, as I look toward the future. We do not want Catholic education to be something for the elite. That would go against our whole philosophy."

The New Orleans Archdiocese, like a number of other dioceses, is starting the new year with a comprehensive strategic plan, consulting with experts from Catholic University in Washington and holding public meetings. Further school closings and consolidations—steps that in the past have distressed parents loyal to Catholic schools in New Orleans and other major cities in the Midwest and Northeast—are bound to be part of the solution, officials admit. —Barri Bronston, RNS

Fewer 'Middle Americans' marry or attend worship

MARRIAGE among Americans who have graduated from high school but not college is on the decline, and their religious attendance has dropped at the same time, a new report shows.

"Middle Americans" ages 25 to 60 who were in their first marriages dropped from 73 percent in the 1970s to 45 percent in the 2000s, according to "The State of Our Unions," an annual report from the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia.

The group described as "Middle Americans" constitute 58 percent of the U.S. adult population. Its members have a high school diploma and may have some postsecondary education but have not obtained a four-year college degree.

Members of this group have seen a

similar drop in religious attendance, from 40 percent attending nearly every week or more in the 1970s to 28 percent in the 2000s.

"In a striking turn of events, highly educated America is now both more marriage-minded and religious than are moderately educated Americans," the report states. "Accordingly, Middle Americans are now markedly less likely than they used to be to benefit from the social solidarity, the religious and normative messages about marriage and family life, and the social control associated with regular churchgoing."

The report is also the result of the work of the Center for Marriage and Families at the New York-based Institute for American Values. —RNS

Germany experiments with training, certifying imams

As Islamic life and society claims an ever-larger place across Western Europe, imams increasingly are being asked to provide guidance to their immigrant and native-born Muslim congregations.

But that leads to the question: Who provides guidance for the imams? New educational and certification programs in Germany and neighboring Austria hope to be the answer.

It's becoming increasingly clear that imams who are telling their Muslim congregations how to respond and adapt to their new homes were themselves trained and educated far from Europe. Often basic concepts—such as democracy or church-state separation—don't resonate with either Islamic spiritual leaders or their flocks.

A new educational program in the western German town of Osnabrück is a few weeks into an experiment to help imams learn about European society so that they in turn can give better advice to their followers.

A similar program is about to see its first graduates in Vienna, and two other

German universities are also working on similar ideas.

Supporters of the German programs eventually want to go beyond filling knowledge gaps on Western society to providing university degrees for would-be imams or Islamic teachers in grade schools.

"There's a deficit here in the area of civic studies," says Rauf Ceylan, a professor of religious studies at the University of Osnabrück who has been instrumental in creating the curriculum. The imams "have really discovered a need here."

In some ways, grafting Islamic education onto the German system is simple. The country has a long tradition of providing religious education in grade schools, and university degrees in religious studies can be a springboard into the clergy or to becoming religious education teachers.

But whereas Germany's Catholic and Lutheran churches have hierarchical structures that allow a central curriculum, Islam has no central decision maker. That's left Ceylan wondering who to pick as a representative for Islam as he develops his imam education program.

"We had to try to find a way to pull the Islamic model in," Ceylan said. "We settled on an advisory council model," which includes members of all major



EASING CULTURE CLASH: *The University of Osnabrück in western Germany has begun a program to educate Islamic imams in hopes of easing the integration of foreign-born Muslims into European life.*

Islamic groups as well as theologians, academics and politicians.

Getting all those groups to agree on one curriculum could prove a challenge, but “it’s absolutely possible,” said Christine Langenfeld, a law professor at Georg-August University in Göttingen. “The curriculum has to make sure that the different influences of Islamic society are included.”

In practical terms, that means different curriculum plans could reflect different theologies within Islam, such as Sunni or Shi’a or Sufi. The various Muslim groups will have to be “flexible,” she said. “They can’t expect that the curriculum exclusively reflects their beliefs.”

Erol Purlu, public affairs director with the Association of Islamic Cultural Centers, said he’s confident that the different Muslim groups can eventually agree on a curriculum. “I think we’ve got a long way ahead of us,” Purlu said. “But if we work together, it will happen.”

There are other matters to be worked out, such as salaries and acceptance of the trainees as spiritual leaders. Currently most religious education teachers in German grade schools are professional teachers, with no formal ties to their church.

In addition, even if curriculums can be drafted and the first class of imams can be graduated, some wonder whether Germany’s Islamic communities will accept imams trained in Germany rather

than in traditional centers of Islamic culture. “These imams will have to fight for acceptance,” said Langenfeld.

So far, Ceylan is optimistic. An extended education program meant for 15 imams was expanded to 30 after 100 attended an informational evening and 50 applied. “We see that the need is there. They are seeking us out,” he said. “They don’t have these kinds of opportunities in Islamic countries.” —Neils Sorrells, RNS

Holder denies entrapment of Muslim suspects

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder defended the FBI’s recent undercover investigation of an Oregon Muslim terror suspect, saying that Muslim critics who think it was a case of “entrapment” are wrong.

“Those who characterize the FBI’s activities in this case as ‘entrapment’ simply do not have their facts straight—or do not have a full understanding of the law,” Holder said December 10 at the annual dinner of Muslim Advocates, a San Francisco-based civil liberties group.

Holder was referring to the arrest November 26 of Mohamed Osman Mohamud, who is charged with plotting to blow up a van full of explosives outside a crowded Christmas tree lighting ceremony in Portland.

“I make no apologies for how the FBI agents handled their work in executing the operation that led to Mr. Mohamud’s arrest,” Holder said. “Their efforts helped to identify a person who repeatedly expressed his desire and intention to kill innocent Americans.”

He said the affidavit in Mohamud’s case alleges that the suspect chose the location he was targeting months ahead of time and refused to change his plans even when reminded that children would be among a large crowd that could be harmed.

Holder said he hears from Muslims that they think there is an “us versus them” mentality in law enforcement. “That is unacceptable,” he said, adding that cooperation with Muslim and Arab-American communities is “absolutely essential” in preventing threats of terrorism. —RNS

Briefly noted

■ Pope Benedict XVI was host to two top Protestant visitors at the Vatican in December, one gently suggesting modest advances in ecumenical ties and the other boldly suggesting that his church tradition and the pope’s issue a common statement on communion by 2017. Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, met Benedict for the first time December 4. Along with other gifts the Norwegian-born Tveit gave Benedict a pair of wool gloves “because in winter they protect well from the cold. So, in this time which, according to some people, is an ecumenical winter, they are a symbol of the possibility to go ahead despite the difficulties, and to continue patiently our work for Christian unity.” On December 16, Bishop Munib Younan, president of the Lutheran World Federation, said before his audience with the pope that the two church traditions should seek “to arrive at 2017 with a common Roman Catholic–Lutheran declaration on eucharistic hospitality” to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation that Martin Luther began in 1517. In his meeting with Younan, Benedict praised the progress made in Catholic–Lutheran dialogue but made no reference to the bishop’s Eucharist proposal. Catholic doctrine currently forbids intercommunion.

■ About 1,000 people in Hong Kong joined a December celebration organized by Christian groups to honor imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo. The event coincided with the Nobel ceremony in Oslo, Norway. The Hong Kong Christian Institute and the local Roman Catholic Justice and Peace Commission arranged the December 10 gathering with nongovernmental groups to commend Liu and to urge Beijing to release him and other political prisoners. Liu has been imprisoned since 2009 as part of an 11-year sentence for “inciting the subversion of state power.” Hong Kong legislator Alan Leong Kah-kit, who is Catholic, told ENI: “Beijing should know that to confer the Nobel Peace Prize on Mr. Liu is not to confront the Chinese people. Human rights are universal values, and should be abided [by] by all.”

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, January 16

John 1:29-42, 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, Isaiah 40:1-7

He saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

THE EVENT CITED in the Gospel lesson has often been celebrated in art, notably in Matthias Grünewald's depiction of the gaunt John the Baptist pointing a bony finger at Jesus with the words: "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" The evangelist's description of the setting is spare. On a certain day John the Baptist is baptizing in Bethany beyond the Jordan. On the next day he sees Jesus coming, and out of the blue he blurts out the exalted title. All seems scripted, stilted and without a preaching handle.

When and where and under what circumstances in 2011 does it ever happen that Christians "see Jesus coming" and call out "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"? We don't live in Bethany beyond the Jordan, and that time is not our time. Yet here is a way into an abundant text that can speak to our time.

Not long ago I was meeting with a family in the narthex of the church and preparing for the funeral service of their loved one, which was to take place that morning. We were ready to close the casket and I began to lead in prayer. Then the narthex church door opened and a man entered. I thought he was a latecomer hurrying in to the funeral.

He made his way to me, apologized for the untimely intrusion and asked if he could speak with me then and there. His face was such a roadmap of anxiety and his agitated manner so revealing of his need that I realized I could not refuse him. I recognized him as someone who was once with us in the congregation but who had left after giving me more grief—years of it—than anyone I've known through my pastoral years.

We stepped aside to a quiet corner. He looked me straight in the eye and got right to the point: "Dean, I've come to tell you how deeply sorry I am for the sins I have committed against you. I ask you to forgive me." Bam—just like that! I knew by the earnestness of his words and the piercing intensity in his eyes that he spoke from the depths of his being and meant every word. This untimely but immensely powerful moment was the fruition of a long, complicated process of stocktaking. On that day, in that place, without forewarning, a John 1:29 moment arrived.

Preaching means announcing God's judgment upon sin and announcing God's promise to redeem us and the world we live

in. Doesn't it mean, in some shape or form, pointing to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world? That said, think of my experience in the church narthex as but one of the myriad ways, times and places in which preaching occurs. Unprepared though I was for it, the Lord Jesus presented himself to me in the person of a tortured man who had been battling his inner demons for years and calling them Dean Lueking. When I spoke his name, put my hands on his shoulders, looked him in the eye and said, "I forgive you," I said the only thing that a fellow forgiven sinner can say, needs to say and wants to say. Then, in forgiving him, I was freed to ask him to forgive me for the sin of resentful judgment against him that had been simmering in me much too long. His response? He caught me up in a near rib-cracking bear hug, then turned and left.

Look for the immediacy of the contextual details (place, time, persons named, action described) in the John 1:29-42 passage and for the substance of what's going on. The Lamb of God is at hand. Forgiveness of sin is offered. The Spirit bears witness. Andrew

In forgiving him, I was freed to ask him to forgive me.

invites Simon to see what it's all about. A community is being formed that will become the one holy, catholic and apostolic church. All of this is unfolding in the midst of everyday routine. Apparently God shows up in the middle of routine, whenever talk and action turn upon the divine grace that forms and commissions Christ's people for healing and reconciling in the world.

How one preaches the John 1:29 text and goes about taking it into our time will necessarily vary. Certainly all the rules of confidentiality apply when citing lived experiences of repentance and forgiveness. But if the one preaching is clear about the power of sin forgiven, those listening get the message and are equipped to take the good news into the next seven days. God packs the power to reclaim from sin and renew through grace into a word we can speak and embody in life. I bear witness to how thrilling and sustaining it is to keep on discovering the trustworthiness of that truth year after year, situation after situation, personal and public, local and global.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 is like a deep breath that St. Paul takes before diving into the rowdy mess called the church of God in Corinth; the "God is faithful" affirmation is his periscope keeping the goal in view. Isaiah 49:1-7 summons the faithful to listen up, to have done with whining, for the mighty deeds of God are beyond anything yet seen. What a wealth of textual choices are set before us!

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, January 23
Matthew 4:12-23, Isaiah 9:1-4

THE MATTHEW 4 and Isaiah 9 readings assigned for this second Sunday of Epiphany each begin with geographic references that are easily overlooked. Zebulun and Naphtali are more than Galilean locations. Both words signaled to eighth-century BCE hearers what Vietnam, Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay signal to our ears—the hellishness of war and the darkness engulfing those who live in its aftermath. But Zebulun and Naphtali are also cited as “crossroads of the nations, where people sitting out their lives in the dark saw a huge light” (*The Message*). Jesus chooses this background, one weighted with historical meaning, as the setting from which to carry out his Galilean ministry. With astonishing boldness he announces that he is the One in whom Isaiah’s prophecy is at last fulfilled, and who calls all to repent and receive the kingdom of heaven now at hand.

These texts are loaded with Epiphany promise—what lay hidden in the mystery of God’s sovereign reign is now out in the open, offering the light of Christ’s grace to all in every place and circumstance. We who are numbed by daily media reports on the plight of people still walking in the thick darkness of hunger, injustice, crime, disease and futile wars need ears open to other news. There are places where Epiphany light shines through people who do the best of things in the worst of times. For example, in Bethlehem where our Lord was born, 70,000 Palestinians are walled in by Israeli military occupation and surrounded by illegal settlements on confiscated Palestinian land. Here Palestinian Lutherans have defied all odds by building a wellness center, a medical clinic, a first-rate cultural center hosting local and international events and a K-12 school for Muslim and Christian students. Two months ago, the first fine arts college in the Arab world was opened under their sponsorship. Dar Al Kalima (“house of the Word”) has 200 full-time students and a thousand more in part-time studies. Despite a dwindling number of Arab Christians, the inclusive organization called Diyar (“home”) serves women, children, youth and the elderly; it is the third largest employer in Bethlehem. I asked Mitri Raheb, the pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church and founding director of Diyar, what keeps him from going crazy under relentless pressures.

“I start a new project,” he said—his way of witnessing to the power of Epiphany light that breaks through the thick darkness of the seemingly impenetrable Arab/Israeli conflict.

The Epiphany texts point to God’s saving reign, which is

continually on the move to the ends of the earth as well as to the innermost reaches of the human heart. The texts invite not lament over how gloomy things are but lively, imaginative following of the light of Christ through whatever darkness defies it. We become partners in faith with those throughout the world whose mission is—with an Epiphany twist on the pun—to make light of the darkness.

The great new fact of our time is that the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted from Europe and North America to Africa, Asia and Latin America. Think of this: in the past hour Christian numbers in the Global South have increased by 18,000, while in the Global North Christian numbers have decreased by 3,000. Do people know that? Can Epiphany faith, thought and action in congregations here go beyond impersonal statistics which can discourage or tempt toward superficial mimicry if left without interpretive discernment?

Philip Jenkins’s *CENTURY* columns on the global church can help us all get on with thinking globally and acting locally. More to the point, Epiphany awareness grows when parishioners return with stories of mission travel and service projects abroad, when congregations host guests from overseas, or when people in local congregations find ways to reach out in welcome to neighbors who have moved in from distant lands. Then hospitality becomes a two-way street. Gifts of mind and spirit brought by

Epiphany light shines from people who do the best of things in the worst of times.

those who are outwardly different are fresh treasures of more lasting value than gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 4:18-23 offers more glimmers of Epiphany light as Jesus calls Simon, Andrew, James and John to discipleship. Here the textual application illumines the congregation as prime territory for the Lord’s call to reach those gifted for pastoral teaching or diaconal ministries in the church. Jesus invited four fishermen to discipleship as he found them at their nets; that history of calling, inviting and recruiting disciples reaches down to our day. Among us in our congregations are people, many of them in their teens, who need someone to hint at something they may not yet have sensed—their potential for a vocation of equipping God’s people for daily ministry in the world. A timely comment, offhand though it may be, can have consequences. According to today’s gospel, it can become soil for such seeding.

The author is F. Dean Lueking, pastor emeritus at Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest, Illinois.

Pursuing happiness

by Timothy Renick

THE ROMAN POET Horace tells the story of Lycas, a wealthy merchant who spent his days entertained by imagined actors performing nonexistent dramatic plays on the grounds of his estate. Lycas drew his greatest joy in life from these imaginary performances, but to onlookers his behavior was sheer madness.

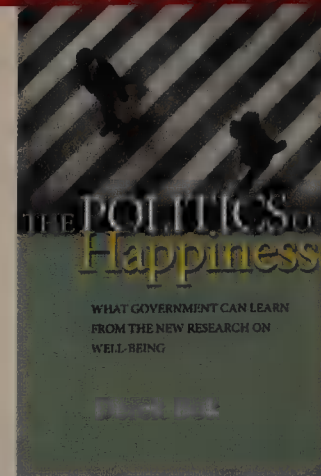
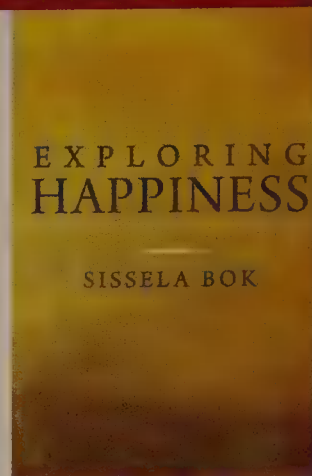
Should one value and affirm a happiness that is based on an illusion? Lycas's relatives thought not. When they finally awakened him from his dream world, Lycas reacted as if betrayed: "You call it rescue, my friends, but what you have done is murder me!"

The story of Lycas captures one of the great challenges to any meaningful discussion of human happiness. Unlike concepts such as justice and courage that seemingly lend themselves to rich treatises about their true nature, happiness is often perceived to be subjective, even inscrutable. We all claim to be able to identify courageous people when we see them, and we believe that we have the critical ability to determine, at times, that a person who claims to be courageous is in fact a fraud, a coward. But what does it mean to say that a person who claims to be happy is not, or that the happiness a person experiences is not real?

Was Lycas's happiness any less real because those around him failed to find joy in the same imaginary plays? If his happiness was somehow less real—less valuable—because it was based on a world not perceptible to onlookers, where does this leave romantics who find their greatest joy in their love for another or religious believers whose happiness rests in a Being beyond conventional sight and sound? Are the experiences of all of these people to be dismissed as madness, or can we responsibly affirm and even promote at least some of these paths to happiness?

These questions are the subject of a pair of books by two leading commentators on contemporary moral and social issues. Sissela Bok, senior visiting fellow at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, offers a clear and engaging historical tour through dozens of competing philosophical renderings of happiness over the ages—from the Greeks to Desmond Tutu. Her husband, Derek Bok, the former president of Harvard and currently a research professor there, examines the political implications and social imperatives that emerge from modern empirical research on the subject of happiness.

Sissela Bok asks, "What do we mean by happiness?" Derek



Exploring Happiness: From Aristotle to Brain Science

By Sissela Bok

Yale University Press, 224 pp., \$24.00

The Politics of Happiness: What Government Can Learn from the New Research on Well-Being

By Derek Bok

Princeton University Press, 272 pp., \$24.95

Bok asks, "Given our emerging scientific consensus about the nature of human happiness, how can government best serve to promote and maximize it?" Not surprisingly, the answers the Boks offer to these questions are complex and provocative—and, I believe, incompatible in significant ways.

Sissela Bok argues that ours is a special time, parallel to the sixth and fifth centuries BC when thinkers such as Confucius, Buddha, Lao-Tzu and Socrates posited a range of competing and world-altering paths to happiness. She writes, "Not since antiquity have there been such passionate debates as those taking place today about contending visions of what makes for human happiness." She holds that there is thus great contemporary value in the process of exploring what others—philosophers, historians, theologians—have written over the centuries about the nature of happiness. The purpose of her book, she cautions, is not to help readers find happiness but to help them "learn about its nature and its role in human lives." In so doing, she tells us, we will learn much about ourselves.

The contemporary political philosopher Robert Nozick raises this possibility: suppose you could attach your body for the remainder of your life to an experience machine. Floating in a tank of fluid and connected by electrodes to an incredibly advanced computer, you would spend the rest of your days fully realizing your greatest personal dreams—winning the Pulitzer Prize or the Super Bowl, inventing a cure for cancer or a new video game—in such a way that these experiences would be utterly indistinguishable to you from reality. The things experi-

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enced, though, would not be real; they would be created solely in your mind by the machine. Given the opportunity, would you plug yourself into this machine for life, thus ensuring the perpetual satisfaction of all of your most cherished desires?

For Augustine, the answer was a clear no. As Sissela Bok explains, Augustine held that there is but one happiness that is worth experiencing, and it is not determined by personal preference. Speaking to God in his *Confessions*, Augustine asserted, “Happiness is to rejoice in You and for You and because of You. This is true happiness and there is no other.” Many things seemed to promise pure happiness to Augustine in his youth—play, food, friendship, sex—but he came to conclude that these pleasures are not real and do not bring happiness of a true sort. Aquinas agreed: “Final and perfect happiness can consist of nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence.”

In our times, supposedly dominated by individual self-interest and the quest for material satisfaction, we might assume that Nozick’s personal-happiness machine would be preferred over the Augustinian vision of a happiness that is found only through individual denial in deference to a higher ideal. But Nozick reports that only about 5 percent of current college students say they would accept the offer to plug into the hypothetical experience machine. Why is there such a resounding rejection of this guaranteed path to personal satisfaction, Bok wants to know. Alternately, what is distinctive about that 5 percent of students that leads them to embrace Nozick’s offer?

Can happiness be found by empirical research?

Here emerges one premise of Sissela Bok’s book: how a person conceives of and defines happiness tells us much about who that person is. Bok’s examples are many. Friedrich Nietzsche rejected the link, suggested by Augustine and Aquinas, between happiness on the one hand and virtue, altruism and God on the other. He defines happiness as “*not* contentment, but more power; *not* peace at all, but war; *not* virtue, but proficiency.” Jonathan Swift told us that “happiness . . . is a perpetual possession of being well deceived.” Seneca wrote, “When once we have driven away all that excites or frightens us . . . there comes upon us first a boundless joy that is firm and unalterable, then peace and harmony of the soul.” Sigmund Freud warned, “One feels inclined to say that the intention that human beings should be happy was not included in the plans of the ‘Creation.’” By means of such single sentences about happiness, we learn much about the fundamental beliefs and overarching philosophies of each of these thinkers.

For readers who seek an answer to the inevitable question of which thinker best captures the true nature of happiness, Sissela Bok offers little help. “There is no one definition of happiness, I suggest, that should exclude all others, much less



JESSE KUHN

be imposed by force and indoctrination.” As to how the seemingly oppositional definitions offered by the likes of Augustine and Freud can coexist, Bok once again offers only very general guidance. “We need to look at the different [theories] together and consider the roles they have played in human lives, weighing together the evidence they offer and the practical implications for how to live and how best to pursue happiness,” she suggests.

While Bok’s reluctance to exercise her formidable philosophical skills to develop a moral recommendation here can be frustrating, the point of *Exploring Happiness* is not to prescribe the content of happiness but to describe the ways in which the rich and continuing historical discourse on human happiness has come to define our deepest convictions and to capture our highest ideals. This it does very well.

In *The Politics of Happiness*, Derek Bok takes a very different tack, basing his argument almost exclusively on recent empirical research into the nature of happiness. Bypassing the history of ideas that is the focus of Sissela Bok’s volume, he explores the post-1970 “boom industry” of surveying people about what they think makes them happy. “Mounds of evidence have accumulated on how happy people claim to be in different countries, how their levels of contentment vary from one subgroup of the population to another, and what conditions or experiences are most closely related to the way people feel about their lives,” Derek Bok tells us.

Although he concedes that there are limits to the value of these polls and opinion surveys about happiness—for one thing, research shows that people are often very poor judges of what will make them happy—Bok believes that “investigators

can now publish findings about the well-being of populations that are far more useful to policy makers” than the theories available to previous generations. This research holds “the prospect of improving many of the judgments that public officials make in devising programs to better the human condition.”

Standards of living have improved, but levels of happiness have not.

What specifically does this recent empirical research on happiness reveal? Bok starts by mapping out four initial findings. First, we learn that while the standard of living in the United States has improved markedly over the past 50 years, average levels of happiness have not. Rich Americans today are, as a whole, modestly happier than poor Americans, but the percentages of Americans who describe themselves as “very happy,” “pretty happy” and “not happy” have not changed for generations. Apparently, our levels of happiness have less to do with the material comforts we possess and more to do with our expectations about the material comforts we believe we should possess.

Second, people tend to overestimate the effects that certain changes in their lives will have on their levels of happiness. They predict that a new car, more money or a move to a warmer climate will bring them more happiness than these things do. The impact of such changes on levels of happiness is modest, and it tends to dissipate almost entirely in a short period of time.

Third, growing levels of inequality in the U.S. between haves and have-nots have not led to growing levels of dissatisfaction. Ironically, the only group that empirical research shows to be measurably upset by the growing economic inequality in the United States are well-to-do Americans. If the election of Barack Obama signaled a new populism in the U.S., there is no sign of such a shift in the happiness research.

Finally, the research shows that there is no correlation between the percent of gross national income that a nation spends on social welfare programs and the average happiness levels of that nation’s population. Swedes are, on average, moderately happier than Americans, but this has more to do with the average economic level of Swedes than with their state-guaranteed health care and family leave rights.

From these empirical findings, Bok develops a series of public policy prescriptions designed to boost overall levels of happiness in society. If people are poor judges of what will make them happy, then, he advises, we should offer more classes in high school to teach students what psychologists and pollsters have learned about happiness: “Learning more about the

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sources of happiness and dissatisfaction can clearly be of great value to students.” If at least minimum levels of wealth are needed for happiness, and if a great source of unhappiness is fear of the loss of a job, Bok suggests, we can employ private arbitrators to provide a basic means of redress for American workers who are unjustly fired. It would also help, Bok contends, to more strictly enforce a 60-day notice period before layoffs are permitted

Most of Bok’s suggestions are modest and reasonable. They also seem arbitrary. It is not clear why alternate and perhaps more radical steps would not be warranted. If people greatly overestimate the happiness derived from the purchase of an expensive new car, we could offer a high school course outlining for students the latest happiness

People are poor judges of what will make them happy.

research and the sober reality of consumer remorse, all the while knowing that the students will go home and be bombarded by the latest Lexus and BMW commercials on television. We might alternately decide to adopt as public policy a ban on those flashy car commercials, much like we did with cigarette ads; or we might impose a hefty luxury tax on cars to get more people to support and utilize public transportation; or we might teach Buddhism in high school, promoting it as a path to the cessation of worldly desire in our youth.

It is not clear why Bok’s suggestions should be preferred over countless other options, why his proposals would be more effective means of raising happiness levels, or why the considerable public resources necessary to pursue any one of these options would be better spent in curbing the people’s desire for a new car (that research shows will not make them happy) than their desire for a fat-laden fast-food burger (that research shows will not make them happy). This quandary uncovers an inherent limit to the research on which Bok is so reliant: at its best, empirical research uncovers what is; it has little to say about what might be.

Using happiness research, Bok also offers scientific affirmation of some of the core values and mores of American life. He reports that people who sustain lasting marriages, contribute to charities, engage in community service, maintain close

friendships and participate in organized religion are all, on average, considerably happier than those who do not. In short, happier people tend to be morally good people—at least by the standards of mainstream American ethics. Bok finds this finding “gratifying” and expresses relief that widespread satisfaction does not come from “taking advantage of others and being insensitive to their needs.”

While I, too, find comfort in these findings, I wish Bok were more critical of the research that he utilizes. One wonders, for instance, if supporting mainstream moral values actually makes one happier, or if people who adhere to mainstream values are happier because their behavior receives less resistance from their peers. In other words, does being married make one happier, or does being married in a culture that validates marriage make one happier? This is a crucial question to settle if we are to use happiness research, as Bok suggests, to shape public policy. If the former is true, we would presumably want to enact laws and policies to promote marriage for as many Americans as possible. If the latter is true, we might want to consider removing tax laws and social policies that favor marriage so nonmarried individuals could find greater happiness in and support for their personal life choices.

It is appropriate to remember that, for all of their differences, Nietzsche and Augustine agreed on at least one point: the vast majority of people find greatest satisfaction in following the path of least resistance—in pursuing the common, the

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everyday, the banal. Both thinkers were at odds with their ages, exhorting their peers to a vision of happiness and the good that was wholly unpopular—one that required personal sacrifice and self-denial. To say that people find happiness in mainstream mores would be neither a surprise nor a validation for Nietzsche or Augustine. To them, it would merely be confirmation of the magnitude of the moral task at hand.

As I read *The Politics of Happiness*, I came increasingly to feel that something significant was missing from Derek Bok's account. Then it hit me. What was missing was a theme that is central to Sissela Bok's volume.

Since ancient times and through centuries of passionate debate—in Horace, Seneca, Augustine, Aquinas, Nietzsche, Swift, Freud and countless others—philosophers, historians and theologians have suggested that there is a critical difference between where people in fact find happiness and where they should find happiness, at least if happiness is to be lasting and true. It is not that this difference has been universally embraced, nor that a consensus has emerged around where happiness should be found, but thinkers have been nearly united in the view that a serious discussion of the philosophical and theological nature of happiness must precede any policy discussion about how happiness might be promoted.

Contemporary research on happiness, grounded as it is in polls and opinion surveys, circumvents this important debate. It reifies that which is and thus limits the debate about what might be. It treats existing opinion as reasoned judgment and proclivities as prescriptions.

To the modern pollster, the opinions of each individual must by definition be weighed equally—the opinions of Lycas as heavily of those of Nietzsche or Augustine. Truth is found in compiling results and determining a consensus. It is tempting to resolve age-old and seemingly intractable philosophical debates by deferring to popular opinion. It is tempting, and it may even be scientific, but is it wise? If not, then when all is said and done, modern happiness research may tell us very little about happiness.

United we sing

by Steven R. Guthrie

IN A COURSE ON theology and beauty, I ask my students why music has been such a persistent feature of Christian worship across history and cultures. In essay after essay, they tell me that this is because music moves us emotionally. Of course this is true. Music engages our emotions and in this way enriches our worship.

Early Christian writers also recognized music's affective power. Just as often, however, they commended music for its powers of harmony—in both the musical and extramusical sense of that word. Music seemed to them a sounding image of rightly ordered relationships. Ignatius of Antioch writes: “In your concord and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung. . . . [So] become a choir, that being harmonious in love, and taking up the song of God in unison, ye may with one voice sing to the Father through Jesus Christ.” For Ignatius, the harmony of believers is not simply a good organizational principle, or even a right behavior to be encouraged. Rather, the harmony of the church is a theological statement. When the church is “in concord,” then “Jesus Christ is sung”—the person and character of Jesus are declared. For Ignatius, the church's unity has both a doxological function—it manifests God's glory—and a pedagogical function—it teaches.

This same conviction stands behind Paul's exhortation to the Ephesians:

Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. (5:18–21)

These references to song come at a climactic moment in the letter. In particular, the command to “be filled with the Spirit” sums up one of the major themes of Ephesians. Throughout the letter Paul urges the community of Christians to embrace their identity as “a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Eph. 2:21–22). In saying this, Paul likens the new community of the church to the temple in Jerusalem.

The temple (and before it the tabernacle) was at the center of the Jewish universe. This was the place on earth where God had chosen to make his dwelling, the place that would be filled with his glory. Paul makes the remarkable claim that the people

of God are now the temple—the place on earth filled with God's presence and glory. The multiethnic church, composed of Jew and gentile, is being “built together spiritually” into the dwelling place of God's Holy Spirit. The command to “be filled with the Spirit,” then, is not simply an exhortation to individual piety. It is connected to Paul's charge to be “joined together” as the people of God—to be the temple.

It's remarkable how closely Paul connects music to this vital command. The command to “be filled with the Spirit” is bound to five activities that fill out the dimensions of this exhortation: *speaking* to one another in songs, hymns and spiritual songs; *singing*; *making music*; *giving thanks* to the Lord; and *submitting* to one another. Three of the five activities have to do with music, which is extraordinary if we think of singing only in terms of emotion. But if singing is a sounding image of the uni-

Singing both enacts the church's unity and manifests its distinctive shape.

fied church, the connection makes a great deal of sense. The unified church is—like Jesus—the temple of the Holy Spirit, the place on earth filled with God's glory.

The wonder of the church's unity is that it draws together those who were formerly adversaries and warring parties. The cross of Christ abolishes the hostility that once existed, not only between humanity and God but between human communities. The church bears witness to the Lord who blessed those who cursed him and loved those who were his enemies.

This reconciled community, Paul declares, is the creation of a new humanity. “For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one . . . that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it” (Eph. 2:14–16).

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The God who created all things (Eph. 3:9) has now created a new humanity (Eph. 2:15) according to the likeness of God (Eph. 4:24). These references to the Genesis creation account reveal the horizon against which Paul understands the church. From Jew and gentile—and in Christ and through the Spirit—God has made a new humanity created in God’s likeness. This restored image is a declaration of God’s character and glory. Paul writes that it is “through the church” that “the wisdom of God in its rich variety [is] now made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10). The unity of the church is a theological statement—a declaration of the wisdom and purposes of God.

Why should Paul associate all of this with singing? First, as I’ve already suggested, singing together is one way of enacting the unity of the church. As Jew and gentile sang together, the “one body” of the church was no longer an abstraction but became a reality that could be heard.

Second, in its congregational song one could hear the gathered church as a church of Jew and gentile with all of its various regional accents, all the distinctive pronunciations of aristocrats, slaves and free people—male and female voices, young and old, all perceived at once in a single melody. This congregational song is not a metaphor of the socially and ethnically diverse church; it is this church, this body’s voice, this body made audible. The church’s song is one way that the church and the Spirit announce this unity to one another and to the wider world.

Singing not only enacts the church’s unity; it also manifests the distinctive shape of that unity. The new humanity is created out of many; there is indeed “one body and one Spirit” (Eph. 4:3–4). This “one Spirit,” however, is the giver of diverse

roles and gifts: “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11). Thus the unity in the new humanity maintains the distinctiveness of its members.

Music provides a compelling sounding image of this differentiated unity. Philosopher Roger Scruton observes that when we sing together we hear “simultaneous voices which are nevertheless also one voice.” We might also say that when we sing together we hear one voice that is nevertheless the voice of many. When I sing among others, I hear a voice that is both mine and not mine, a voice that is both in and outside of me. I hear my voice and your voice and this third thing—our voices together.

Singing together also gives us a picture of submission, but one that is winsome rather than oppressive. We have already seen that the command to “be filled with the Holy Spirit” is elaborated by five activities, the first three of which have to do with singing and making music. The fifth is “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Those who are filled with the Spirit both sing to one another and submit to one another, and within this passage the phrase “submitting to one another” is informed and conditioned by “singing to one another.” What a difference it might make if we were to take music as the model of mutual submission between husband, wives, parents, children, slaves and masters—if song were the school we attended to learn this kind of submission!

What kind of mutual submission happens in song? Singers submit themselves to a common tempo, a common musical structure and rhythm. In addition, those who sing surrender to the constraints of a particular melody and harmony, a common key and tonal hierarchy. But these are not oppressive limits. They are limits that facilitate rather than frustrate the participants’ intention to sing.

Musical submission also involves genuine participation. It is not and cannot be the silencing of the weaker by a dominant voice. The chorus is a society whose life depends on its members contributing their voices. In a multivoiced harmony, privileging some voices and excluding others does not mean that the louder voices “win.” Rather, the harmony as a whole fails.

Finally, and perhaps most obviously, music may help us to understand what it means to listen and respond to others. The character of sin is that it is *incurvatus in se*—turned in upon itself. Conversely, living as children of light means attending to and responding to others.

At the most basic level singing together reminds us that there are others in the room—that the people seated to my right and left have voices. In song I participate in the experience of using my voice alongside and in concert with the voices of others. We have all attended musical performances where one poor soul in the choir makes the shift from fortissimo to pianissimo one note too late. When singing in a group we instinctively avoid such embarrassing moments. If the others in the room are singing softly and slowly, I do so as well. Unremarkable though this may seem, in these instances we indwell a kind of sensitivity and responsiveness to others. And if we have ears to hear, we are reminded that the new humanity in Christ includes voices other

After snowfall

The moonrise on the cheek of snow.
Words that charm me while I sleep.
When I get up, what do I know?
The meaning’s gone. No residue.

Instead there’s traffic, shoveling, boots.
The moonrise on the cheek of snow
elopes with me. Or wants to.
At ten, I don’t indulge it. No,

I shush it. And at noon there’s no
dark force on earth could make me go.
The moonrise on the cheek of snow
knows what it wants: its way with me.

Finally, at dusk, I fall asleep
and what wild peace, to feel it grow,
this child, this song whose father is
The moonrise on the cheek of snow.

Jeanne Murray Walker

than our own—voices of different quality, timbre and register to which we must tune our own song.

Do these descriptions of music bear any meaningful relation to our actual experience of church music? It's one thing to talk about music as the "sounding image of the new humanity," but what about the more mundane—and more contentious—world of choir rehearsals, music committees and choosing songs for Sunday morning? Music seems to split churches more often than it unifies them. Where then is this musical enactment of unity we have been describing?

First, we might note that we could ask similar questions concerning most of the practices of the church. Preaching, the reading of scripture, the sacraments—all of these are good gifts given to the church for its life and health. None, however, infallibly bring about the good for which they are intended. The Lord's Supper is also meant to embody the unity of the church, but like music it has been the source of disunity, debates and divisions. Such failures simply bear witness to the fact—sad but uncontroversial—that we often misuse God's good gifts. That music should be the source of discord is ironic, but it is not an irony unique to music.

Despite this, there are still instances in which music functions within the church in the ways I have described. I'll mention one small example from my own experience—a small example, but one that has stayed with me.

For several years I worked as a minister of music. One of the churches I served during this time had suffered through a series of particularly difficult disagreements about music. I chaired the church's music committee and sat through week after week of tense and unproductive meetings.

One week, feeling as if I had nothing to lose, I suggested that we begin our meeting by singing a couple of hymns together a cappella. After we finished, we went on to have the same discussions, the same disagreements and the same stalemates. But the conversation seemed a little more gracious, the atmosphere a bit more open. Encouraged, I began the next week's meeting with several minutes of singing, and did so again the following week and the next—each week through the rest of the committee's tenure. No one will be surprised to hear that our problems were not immediately resolved. There was, however, a noticeable change. Our meetings warmed considerably. There was a greater sense of camaraderie, and we became better at listening to one another. We compromised and made slow, steady progress on our disagreements. We came to enjoy our time together and—remarkably—over several months even began to resemble something like a Christian community. No doubt part of the change simply came

about as we got to know one another better. Certainly, there were people praying for us, and I believe those prayers were effective. But it seemed to me (and to others on the committee, when we discussed it later) that our singing also had played an important part in bringing about a change. The singing had been not so much "moving" or "inspiring" as instructive.

It is safe to assume that all of the members of that music committee had previously heard Paul's description of the church as the body of Christ. No doubt, if pressed, any of us could have offered a few helpful thoughts on the unity of the church. But as we sang together, we came to understand what unity that might mean and sound like in this room, in the midst of these issues, among these people with these voices. We all would have affirmed the wisdom of Paul's command: "Submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ." But with each week's opening hymns, we were forced to rehearse this mutual submission. The truths we had previously understood we began to indwell. Harsh and irritable tones of voice were more quickly revealed as such when set immediately alongside our four-part singing. We seemed to remember more readily that each one around the table had a voice, and that it was best for the whole group if each voice were heard. We discovered that the sound of all of our voices together could be beautiful, not just frustrating. Our singing modeled the kind of community to which God was calling us, and we declared the glory of God a little more faithfully for having listened to the wisdom of song.



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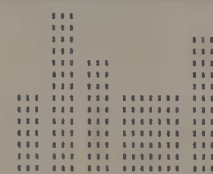
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Against religion

by Douglas John Hall

ON SEPTEMBER 12, 2001, the following paragraph appeared in the British newspaper the *Guardian*:

[Heretofore] many of us saw religion as harmless nonsense. Beliefs might lack supporting evidence but, we thought, if people needed a crutch for consolation, where's the harm? September 11th changed all that. Revealed faith is not harmless nonsense, it can be lethally dangerous nonsense. Dangerous because it gives people unshakable confidence in their own righteousness. Dangerous because it gives them false courage to kill themselves, which automatically removes normal barriers to killing others. Dangerous because it teaches enmity to others [who are] labelled only by a difference of inherited tradition. And dangerous because we have all bought into a weird respect, which uniquely protects religion from normal criticism. Let's now stop being so damned respectful.

The author of these words, Richard Dawkins, is frequently dismissed for his reductively atheistic pronouncements; but I believe that people of faith, *any* faith, need to take this particular pronouncement very seriously. Though it was inspired by a particular event involving a debased form of Islam, it applies just as cogently to religious fanaticism wherever it is found—and it is found (in abundance, let us admit) on the North American continent, where it is usually associated with a type of Christianity that has become so dominant in our context as to be thought by many almost normative.

Such Christianity, though it regularly basks in an aura of true-believing Bible faith, seems oblivious to the critique of religion that runs throughout the pages of both the older and the newer Testaments. In fact, if the testimony of theologians still highly honored among thinking Protestants is to be believed, Richard Dawkins's statement could be seen as having a remarkable continuity with the prophet Amos's denunciation of cultic pomposity (5:21f.) or the more scathing letters to the churches of Asia Minor in the Book of Revelation. For theologians as different in their approach as were Karl Barth, Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, religion, far from being "harmless nonsense," should be regarded with at least as much suspicion as Dawkins thinks—and more, since it is for them usually a travesty of genuine faith.

The critique of religion is not limited to the thought of these three, but it is rather interesting that their wariness and mistrust

of religion has been, if not altogether forgotten, almost totally absent from Christian consciousness in the decades following their demise. In order to give concreteness to the subject, I shall quote passages from the writings of all three.

"The message of the Bible," the young Karl Barth was wont to remark (perhaps because he was minister in a Swiss village that loved to think itself properly religious), "is that God hates religion." What "we must say [of religion] is that it is the one great concern of *godless men*" (*Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1).

Barth included in his voluminous *Church Dogmatics* a whole section (about 30 long pages of small print) titled "Religion as Unbelief"—a piece of theological reflection often

Faith is trust in a transcendent reality that defies definition.

reminiscent of Kierkegaard's *Attack upon Christendom*. And Barth is not speaking of the "other" religions only, but of Christianity as well—and perhaps even especially of Christianity. The Christian religion too, he writes, "stands under the judgment that religion is unbelief, and is not acquitted by any inward worthiness." Religion, Barth declares,

is a *grasping*. . . . Man tries to grasp at truth [by] himself. . . . But in that case he does not do what he has to do when truth comes to him. He does not *believe*. If he did, he would listen; but in religion he talks. If he did, he would accept a gift; but in religion he takes something for himself. If he did, he would let God Himself intercede for God; but in religion he ventures to grasp at God.

Paul Tillich, though he disagreed with Barth on many counts, was at least as sharp in his attack on religion as Barth. In a sermon titled "The Yoke of Religion," based on the statement of Jesus, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden . . . take my yoke upon you" (Matt. 11:28–29),

Douglas John Hall's many books include *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World*.

Tillich argues that “the burden [Jesus] wants to take from us is the burden of religion.” He continues,

We are permanently in danger of abusing Jesus by stating that He is the founder of a new religion, and the bringer of another, more refined, and more enslaving law. And so we see in all Christian churches the toiling and laboring of people who are called Christians, serious Christians, under innumerable laws which they cannot fulfill, from which they flee, to which they return, or which they replace by other laws. This is the yoke from which Jesus wants to liberate us. He is more than a priest or a prophet or a religious genius. These all subject us to religion. He frees us from religion. They make new religious laws; He overcomes the religious law. . . .

We call Jesus the Christ not because He brought a new religion, but because He is the end of religion, above religion and irreligion, above Christianity and non-Christianity. We spread his call because it is the call to every person in every period to receive the New Being, that hidden saving power in our existence, which takes from us labor and burden, and gives rest to our souls.

It is true that Tillich elsewhere is able to use the term *religion* in a more neutral or sometimes even a positive way, namely, as descriptive of a human striving for meaning and deliverance, to which the revelation in Christ comes as response and resolution. The striving, the longing (*Sehnsucht*) for God is for Tillich, as for most of these thinkers, of the essence of human being. It's not the searching but the finding that's the problem! Too much religion is entirely too successful in finding, defining and circumscribing the Infinite and in using its convictions to denounce others. It substitutes for the essential otherness and mystery of the divine the doctrinal and moral certitudes that serve precisely the nefarious ends that the atheist Dawkins names. The great caution uttered in the fourth century of the common era by that North African spiritual genius Augustine of Hippo needs to be writ large over all such presumption: *Si comprehendis, non est Deus* (“If you think you understand, it's not God you're talking about”).

The polar opposite of this kind of religious certitude, for those theologians grouped around the misleading term

neo-orthodoxy in the 20th century, is faith. Bonhoeffer's comments are particularly instructive. Following an ancient exegetical device (but giving it a new twist), Bonhoeffer contrasted the two biblical stories of Babel and Pentecost to concretize the difference between religion and faith.

The myth of the tower of Babel is perhaps the Bible's most dramatic symbolic depiction of the religious impulse—the temptation, as Barth called it, of “grasping” after the Ultimate, the struggle for possession and *securitas*. In that saga, human beings, terrified by the precariousness of their creaturehood (well, human creaturehood *is* precarious), reach up after divine







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transcendence in a pathetic and futile effort to secure the future. Their absurd tower, the first (as one may say) of many such towers, is an attempt, as it were, to get hold of and control the Controller. What they get instead is a still greater consciousness of their finitude and vulnerability: scrambling for divinity, they end in an abysmal failure of common humanity.

By contrast, Bonhoeffer saw, Pentecost, the spiritual beginnings of the Christian movement described in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, does not depict human beings grasping after the Absolute but rather the divine Spirit descending to and transforming human beings from within, as Jeremiah insisted is the only authentic transformation. Babel, the religious quest, ends in even greater human alienation; Pentecost, the birth of faith, initiates reconciliation even among those who cannot fully understand one another.

Why, we may ask, is it important for us today to revisit and reclaim this neo-orthodox critique of religion? We should do so in the first place because this is not just a 20th-century theological invention but a courageous attempt to recover a genuine and unavoidable biblical theme—a theme that transcends religious particularity and finds echoes in all profound experiences of the presence of the holy. Christians lost sight of this critique as soon as the Christian religion took upon itself the role of religious establishment, and wherever that ambition enters a community of

faith—*any* community of faith—it annuls or corrupts the very experience that gave birth to that community: namely, the experience of faith—that is, of trust—not in individual or institutional power but in a transcendent Presence that defies containment, definition or even comprehension. A religion that wants to commend itself to everyone and to dominate (to be Christendom) cannot afford to be self-critical. It must be promotional, upbeat, positive!

That message is surely unavoidable for all who take scripture seriously; yet Christendom was adept at repressing precisely that message. During the Christendom ages, biblical texts critical of religion, such as those famous lines of Amos about God's hatred of false, noisy worship, could be explained as applying not to the church but to Judaism, the failed parental faith that Christianity was destined to displace. Such rationalization is, I suspect, characteristic of every religion that seeks to achieve imperial status. The critique of religion is genuine only when the community of faith knows that this critique applies first to itself—that it is part (as the First Epistle of St. Peter puts it) of “the judgment that begins with the household of faith.”

Today there is an even more important reason why this biblical critique of religion needs to be studied and reflected on by all persons of faith as we try to discover ways of living faithfully in a religiously diverse and physically restricted planet. Insofar as religion is inherently a kind of grasping, as Barth insisted, it follows that the religious impulse will also engender

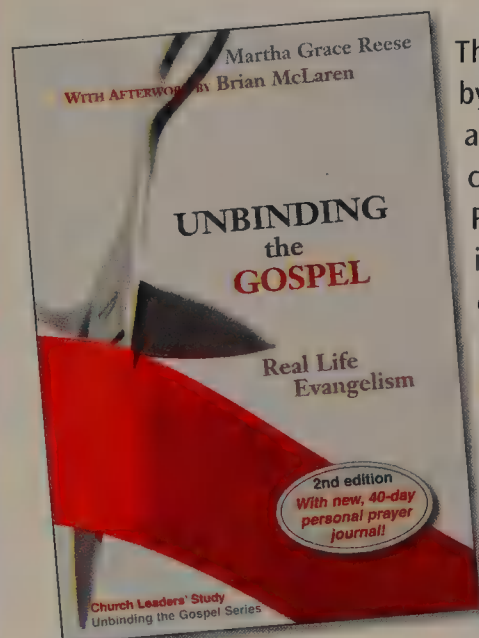
an inherently competitive and conflictive spirit. A spiritual struggle that is motivated by the desire for finality, certitude and the possession of ultimate verity is not likely to manifest much openness to, or even interest in, other claims to truth. To the contrary, it will foster the type of exclusivity that guards its spiritual treasures zealously, having as it were wrested them from eternity.

In every religion, there are vulnerable points—ideas, attitudes or emphases which, under certain historical conditions, are bound to become flash points of conflict. But surely there is no point more redolent of potential violence than this kind of spiritual certitude itself. In a global village where religious disputation no longer limits itself to quarrels within the various historic religions but spills over increasingly into the unprecedented meeting of world religions, every one of them made newly insecure by their felt awareness of one another and of rampant secularity, the greatest flash point of all is inseparable from the religious impulse as such. With its clamoring for ultimacy, its frenetic triumphalism, its incapacity for existential doubt and the entertainment of alternatives, such religion inevitably courts violent opposition. The newly

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minted atheism of today understands this and capitalizes on it. It argues, with a kind of dogged logic, that the only way humankind can avoid the great catastrophes to which this situation points is by dispensing altogether with “the God delusion.”

Persons of faith must embrace a greater realism than that. No one—and certainly not a bevy of smugly atheistic Oxford dons—is going to rid *homo sapiens* of the religious impulse. Contrary to Bonhoeffer’s later musings about the seeming disappearance of *homo religiosus*, it appears likely that human beings will continue to build their spiritual towers of Babel, world without end. But biblical faith, and the intimations of that faith that may be found in extrabiblical sources, will at least be able to maintain a critical perspective on religion—especially one’s *own religion*. The thoughtfully faithful will be delivered a little from what Tillich calls the “burden” of religion, which is religion’s perpetual temptation to take heaven by storm, to imagine itself above mere creaturehood and to award itself the place of finality.

Probably faith—by which I mean awe and trust in the presence of the holy—will never be found in easy separation from religion—some religion; but the thoughtfully faithful will nevertheless be able to distinguish between what comes of faith and what comes of religion. And the greatest distinction of all in this contrast will always lie in the readiness of faith, unlike religion, to confess its radical incompleteness and insufficiency—indeed, its brokenness. How could it not do so?

As the prophet Isaiah cries in the presence of the holy, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips” (6:5). Likewise, the apostle Peter, experiencing in a new and dramatic way the fathomless depths of Jesus’ compassion, commands, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8). In short, there is an intrinsic modesty in faith, and it has nothing to do with bourgeois politeness or political correctness. Authentic faith can never rest content with itself; it can never extinguish its own existential antithesis, doubt; and it can never assume that it has arrived at its destination—that now it “sees” face to face and not as through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12).

I conclude with a quotation that ought to be heard alongside and in contrast to the quotation from Dawkins with which I began. Dawkins faulted religion precisely because it bolstered the tendency of its already humanly egocentric devotees to believe themselves unassailably right and true. I am glad to concede that Dawkins’s statement is an accurate characterization of the great temptation of *homo religiosus*. The statement I wish to cite presents a very different image of the human

being encountered by “the Eternal Thou” (Martin Buber), for it seeks to depict not religion but faith. It is the confession of one of the great Christian activists and lay theologians of our epoch, a French Protestant who was part of the resistance to the Nazis and who was so committed to the possibility of the reign of God in the world that he did not stop with resistance but entered the political arena, eventually becoming the mayor of Bordeaux—thus demonstrating the Reformation’s insistence that true faith begets, besides modesty, the courage to hope and to work for change. His name was Jacques Ellul, and this is how he described the posture of faith:

Faith is a terribly caustic substance, a burning acid. It puts to the test every element of my life and society; it spares nothing. It leads me ineluctably to question my certitudes, all my moralities, beliefs and policies. It forbids me to attach ultimate significance to any expression of human activity. It detaches and delivers me from money and the family, from my job and my knowledge. It’s the surest road to realizing that “the only thing I know is that I don’t know anything.” (*Living Faith: Belief and Doubt in a Perilous World*, translated by Peter Heinegg)

Such faith, and not religious bravado, is the prerequisite for dialogue between the religions today; it is also, I believe, the condition sine qua non of civilization’s survival. CC

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Marcus Borg is canon theologian at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, Oregon. Internationally known in both academic and church circles as a biblical and Jesus scholar, he was Hundere Chair of Religion and Culture in the Philosophy Department at Oregon State University until his retirement in 2007. He is the author of many books, and his first novel, *Putting Away Childish Things*, was published in 2010. *Speaking Christian*, his 20th book, will be published in March 2011.

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by Barbara Brown Taylor

The Muslim Jesus

EVERY COUPLE OF YEARS I have the opportunity to teach a “special topics” course at Piedmont College—a onetime offering that may appeal to a broader audience than the regular religion courses listed in the catalog. Sometimes I choose a subject I know something about, like Christian mysticism or the Gnostic gospels. This fall I chose a subject I only half knew about: Jesus in the New Testament and the Qur’an.

It sounded like such a simple, straightforward project—promising students better information and more opportunity for critical thinking about differences between Christianity and Islam than they were getting anywhere else in their lives. First we would focus on the four portraits of Jesus in the New Testament; then we would turn to the pertinent verses of the Qur’an to get a panoramic look at Jesus. At least that was the plan when I conceived the course.

When it came time to choose textbooks, the extent of my naïveté began to dawn. Even after I had found readable books by generous Christian and Muslim scholars (including Michael Lodahl, Mahmoud Ayoub and Mathias Zahniser), it became clear that we could not adequately compare passages from the New Testament and the Qur’an without first exploring the provenance, voice, content and role of those texts in the two great faiths they represent. To skip this step would be like serving students a plate of southern fried chicken alongside a tureen of *Khoresh-e fesenjan ba jukeh* (Persian pomegranate stew with chicken) and asking them which one tasted better.

In order to become even marginally more educated tasters we spent the first half of the semester comparing Christian and Muslim views of revelation (one focuses more on a person, the other more on a book), Christian and Muslim views of God (one counts to three, the other stops at one) and Christian and Muslim experiences of scripture (one reads God’s word in translation, the other hears God’s word recited in the original language).

We learned why it is difficult to read the Qur’an (one book received by one prophet over 23 years) alongside the New Testament (a library of 27 books written by at least ten authors over some 50 years). We recognized the difference between a sacred text that arose from a community of faith (as the early church decided what would be in the New Testament) and a sacred text that produced a community of faith (as the revelation of the Qur’an created the first Muslim *ummah*). By the time we got to the material about Jesus, most of us knew how much we did not know, which was a great help.

The big surprise was how much time and ink Muslims have spent thinking about Jesus—not just the contemporary writers we read but also the historic commentaries they cited. While a few

students came to class aware of Jesus’ status as a major messenger of Islam, others had not supposed that the Qur’an had anything nice to say about him. Yet there he was, in Qur’an and commentary—the word of God, bearer of the gospel—the Messiah born of the Virgin Mary, ascended to heaven and expected to return near the day of judgment to help defeat the forces of evil.

Then again, there he was *not*—not the son of God, not crucified or resurrected—which is to say, not divine and therefore not essential to the economy of salvation—insisting that he never taught anyone to worship him. Yet students who might have taken umbrage at these omissions in the beginning were by now able to recognize the differences between Christian and Muslim views of salvation (one relies on a mediator, the other holds each believer accountable) as well as Christian and Muslim reverence for Jesus (one worships him as savior, the other venerates him as sinless exemplar).

Muslims have spent a lot of time thinking about Jesus.

In short, we could not get to Jesus without going through the origins of the two faiths that share him, along with their views of God, nature, revelation, faith, salvation and eschatology. No one in this class is ever likely to argue that all religions are alike. At the same time, the consensus is that Christianity and Islam disagree about the same Jesus. In the memorable words of Mathias Zahniser, the two faiths are “standing apart on common ground.”

What I am left wondering is how the students will fare with their new insights after class is over. During this semester alone they have heard plenty of polemic both in the news and in the dining hall about the proposed *masjid* near Ground Zero, the plans of a church in Florida to burn the Qur’an, the bomb plot by a Somali teenager in Oregon, and the retaliatory fire set at the *masjid* he attended. The students’ efforts to correct misinformation have not always been welcomed, and even they may have doubts about their motives.

As their Christian teacher, I am both glad the semester is over and freshly aware that the effort required for this course is the bare minimum for those who wish to know more about their neighbors than either their uninformed hopes or fears can provide.

Barbara Brown Taylor teaches at Piedmont College and Columbia Theological Seminary.

IN Review

On the move

by LaVonne Neff

When I hear the word *immigration*, I immediately think of friends, refugees from a war-torn country, who have spent more than 20 years and \$30,000 trying to become legal U.S. residents—to no avail.

I then think of Arizona relatives, who—convinced that illegal immigration increases crime, taxes and unemployment—strongly support their state's recent efforts to ferret out undocumented immigrants and send them back home.

My refugee friends and Arizona relatives agree about one thing: America's immigration system is broken. President Obama, whose path-to-citizenship plan would help my friends, has said so. And so has Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell, who wants to secure the borders Arizona-style, even if it would mean sending people back into danger.

Everyone knows that the United States needs to fix immigration. But nobody knows how to do it.

Jeffrey Kaye doesn't know how to do it either, but his fascinating study of the economic and political forces affecting immigration should be required reading for anyone likely to express an opinion on the topic.

A freelance journalist who reports for the *PBS NewsHour*, Kaye looks at immigration through stories about immigrants and those who hire them, interviews with political and business figures, interesting (and often ironic) historical parallels, and mountains of data. Though he clearly disagrees with many current attempts to regulate immigration, he never minimizes the complexity of the problem. Rather than advocating for a particular solution, he provides the context that is usually missing from news accounts, op-ed pieces and political oratory.

Migration is not new, Kaye points out: "From the epic Exodus tale in the Bible to the story of Odysseus, our myths and legends attest to mobility as a central theme in the human saga." Kaye's own ancestors moved from Poland to England in the late 1800s, and in 1963 he moved with his family from London to Los Angeles.

Panic over immigration is not new either. A century ago, as boats full of Italians, Germans, Irish and Eastern Europeans were docking at Ellis Island, newspapers accused the newly arrived of causing "wasteful administration of public funds," increasing violence and crime, taking Americans' jobs and refusing to learn English—exactly what some of those immigrants' descendants are saying about Mexican immigrants today.

It's easy to empathize with desperately poor people who cross seas and borders in order to provide for their families. According to Kaye, however, the poverty of individual families is only one factor in today's immigration patterns. Business practices also play a major role in enticing people to leave their homelands. "The globally interconnected business engines that promote and support" migration affect not just the U.S., which has more immigrants than any other nation, but also the more than 60 nations whose percentage of immigrants surpasses our own, and the even greater number of nations whose citizens are heading out to greener pastures.

In the global economy, businesses need a cheap, movable, disposable workforce, and immigrants fill the bill. Despite low pay and often miserable working conditions, they grow, harvest, process and serve most of the world's food. They also build, repair and maintain many of the world's buildings. At the

other end of the socioeconomic scale, they provide a significant percentage of highly educated workers in the health-care and technology industries. Thanks to immigrants, consumers enjoy low prices and businesses grow. What would developed nations do without them?

For that matter, what would developing nations do without the money that immigrants send to their families back home—in 2008, \$45 billion to India, \$34.5 billion to China, \$26.2 billion to Mexico and \$18.3 billion to the Philippines? It is not surprising that "a business infrastructure trains, recruits, and markets Filipino workers the way that banana republics used to cultivate crops," or that global recruitment enterprises ranging from publicly traded companies to illegal smuggling operations "comprise a multi-billion-dollar-a-year industry."

If business decisions entice immigrants to cross borders, government policies often drive them to leave their homes. Trade policies that look good for a developed country may devastate its poorer neighbors. The NAFTA agreement, for example, jointly signed by the U.S., Canada and Mexico, drove down the price of corn and financially ruined hundreds of thousands of Mexican farmers. And even efforts to help may have unintended consequences: a U.S. loan



Moving Millions: How Coyote Capitalism Fuels Global Immigration

By Jeffrey Kaye
Wiley, 320 pp., \$27.95

LaVonne Neff blogs about politics, food and books at livelydust.blogspot.com. She also reviews books at neffreview.blogspot.com.

intended to stabilize the Mexican peso led to the “bankruptcy of hundreds of thousands of companies, . . . the disappearance of several million jobs” and the migration of approximately 6 million additional immigrants to the United States.

What are poverty-stricken families supposed to do when government agreements remove their source of income, an industry in another country offers wages several times higher than they could earn at home, and a business in their own country offers to ferry them to the promised land—legally in some cases, illegally in many others?

Obviously, they migrate. “Build walls, and people will go over, around, or under them,” Kaye writes. “Hire border guards, and smugglers will bribe them. Step up patrols, and migrants will find alternate routes. Provide better-paying jobs, and workers will get to them. Migration will not be stopped.”

And yet migration has a dark side. As Kaye notes, businesses that hire immigrants benefit from cheap labor, but native-born workers may then fear for their jobs. Countries that send immigrants benefit from huge cash inflows, but they may lose their best, brightest and hardest-working citizens. Many immigrants—if they make it alive across the seas, mountains and deserts separating them from their destinations—find better-paying jobs abroad, but they may spend years separated from their loved ones and are often ruthlessly exploited by their employers.

Wouldn’t it be better if everybody just stayed home?

Maybe, Kaye says, but only if massive income disparities between the world’s haves and have-nots were eliminated or reduced, and that’s not going to happen anytime soon. So long as businesses and governments think of immigrants as mobile resources, current migration patterns will continue. After all, immigration helps businesses prosper and lets governments ignore their thorniest problems:

Where sending nations should be addressing such urgent needs as developing their economies and finding ways to keep families and communities together, instead, outflows of migrants let them off the hook. By the same token, in destination countries, migration reduces the incentive to create sustainable economies that are able and willing to tap their own resources.

Given the global context of migration, can America fix—or at least improve—its broken system? Kaye is not optimistic. Our current approach is dysfunctional: though our economic health depends on our more than 12 million undocumented immigrants, we pay them poorly, deny them benefits and force them to live in fear of deportation. Yet change is impeded by “a messed-up political standoff.”

If Kaye were a prophet, he might say that “the alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself” (Lev. 19:34). Instead, he simply observes that “in the final analysis, how we respond to migration and how we treat the strangers among us are reflections of our connections to humanity.”

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Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being

By Andrew Root

Baker Academic, 208 pp., \$19.99 paperback

On the way to meet a friend whose marriage, I'd heard, was on the rocks, I sifted through the clichés one can offer someone on the verge of divorce. But when I arrived, her husband was with her to welcome me. As we traveled around her campus together I noticed them holding hands (so rare on U.S. college campuses that you wonder if it violates some regulation). And during my lecture the nonacademic husband attended—and even (gasp!) asked a question. Somehow being with them amidst a marriage being patched back together, a love being renewed, made me a bit more human than I was when I arrived. I hugged my wife tightly when I returned home.

Andrew Root is one of those writers

who produces so much you wonder how he also maintains a bustling young family and teaches full-time (at Luther Seminary). This is, by my and Amazon's count, his third book in two years. Most of his recent work is in his academic field of youth ministry, which he entered when studying with Kenda Creasy Dean at Princeton Seminary. The book is filled with piss and vinegar; Root doesn't assume the detached posture of many academic writers.

Trying to make theological sense of divorce, Root boldly argues that the severance of a marriage presents an ontological challenge to children—it threatens them at the level of their very being. I think this argument incorrect, confused and confusing, but I am thankful that Root has taken on the topic. His and my generation is the first in which we can assume that our peers' parents are split rather than together. That must mean something. I'm not sure what it means but I'm grateful for his effort to tackle it.

Root's primary mode of argumentation is based on an anecdote about a child of

divorce who feels her very existence is called into question. The relationship between her parents, which once was the very source of her being, is now severed. As Root sees it, this is far worse than the end of a marriage by death, for divorce calls the child's existence into question retroactively. Root alludes to a Gen X touchstone, the film *Back to the Future*, in which the lead character goes back in time and sees that his parents' meeting almost didn't take place, and he begins to dematerialize. This is how Root says he felt when his own parents' marriage ended: "It seemed as if I were fading into nothingness."

In arguing that our being comes from community, the severance of which threatens us at no less a level than that of being, Root spends most of his time with Martin Heidegger, the social theorist Anthony Giddens and Karl Barth, whom he badly misreads as a full-blown social trinitarian.

The strength of this book is Root's observation that modernity's culture of freedom is inherently contradictory. Parents seeking to be free of their mar-

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riage place a burden, and therefore unfreedom, on their children. Root offers wise observations about how a church can attend to the aches of children of divorce: it can be brave enough to see their pain and to call them to serve others as a way of healing. And Root is right to have no patience with the breezy, selfish culture of divorce.

But his argument feels forced to me, in some places whiny and in others dangerous. In real life, unlike in the movies, people don't dematerialize when their parents divorce. They may struggle with pain at a profound level that can feel like or even lead to death, but this pain is more properly called existential or psychological than ontological. It may have seemed to Root that he was "fading into nothingness," but of course he wasn't.

Root points to his wife's anguish at her parents' divorce. She had been raised with the insistence that family comes first. When family crumbled, "There were no guarantees in the world, death could take anyone, accidents could and would happen." The mistake here was the original insistence on "family first." Any Christian, even the sort who celebrates the nuclear family, should know that God comes first. And any adult should know that accidents can and do happen. One could argue that the shaking of security that Root is so exercised about is just a realization of the fragility of human existence that is always there.

Children of Divorce is offered as theology, but it is not nearly theological enough. Root regularly speaks of the biological nuclear family as the "unavoidable foundation" that "gives us being." But our foundation is actually God. Any adoptee should be able to tell you that there is more than one way to be family. And any church member should be able to tell you that the community that grants us security (such as there is) and even being is the church, linked to Jesus as vine to branches, body to head. At times these glaring theological oversights can run to the comic. For example, Root says that humanity's "most historically dynamic act" is the union of husband and wife that creates a child. But

for Christians it's baptism. My deepest concern is about Root's insistence that only blood relationship gives us being and makes for family. Fascists would quickly agree. Christians never should. For us, water is thicker than blood.

Root's argument would be more successful if he offered it on theological grounds. Oddly, the only scripture he uses is Genesis. (Jesus has a few things to say about nuclear families, but "unless you hate father and mother" would not much help Root.) Marriage in a doctrinal key does create "one flesh," celebrated extravagantly in Solomon's Song and praised as the mirror of Christ's union with the church in Ephesians. A christological vision of marriage would show that divorce indeed strikes at an ontological level. And when that happens, when we humans commit our worst sin—that's when theology really gets interesting. For precisely there Jesus plunges into the flesh of our humanity to save us at our worst.

For Root, theology is a way to say that divorce is really really really bad (ontol-

ogy seems to function for him more as a rhetorical trope than as a category in metaphysics). His suggestions about how the church can respond are tentative at best, offered in the form of bullet-pointed helpful hints.

Theologically, the church must stitch humanity back together slowly, organically, physically, *ontologically*. And the church offers us the wonder of friendships, where we can see God's Spirit do things like patch a friend's marriage back together when we thought it was over and thus radiating hope far beyond the nuclear family, but including the nuclear family too.

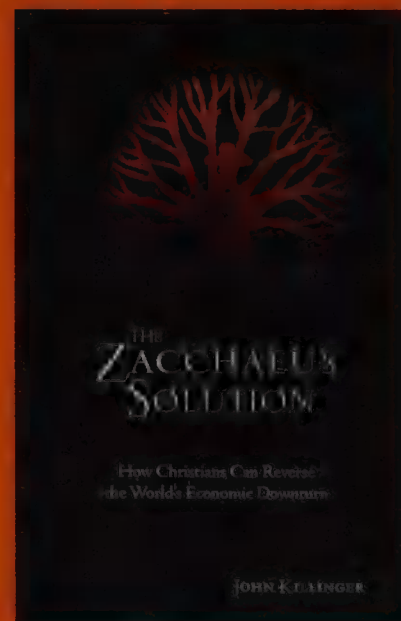
Root's logic seems to be this: the Trinity proves we are social creatures, divorce violates that sociality, therefore . . . (what should follow is not clear). As I read the gospel, the story runs quite differently. We all violate one another's sociality, and then God in Christ breaks in to do what we could not: bring reconciliation and redemption. The latter story is the one that offers hope to those who suffer from whatever it is that divorce is.

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Reviewed by Jason Byassee, a CENTURY contributing editor who is executive director of leadership education at Duke Divinity School.

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Living Christianity: A Pastoral Theology for Today

By Shannon Craigo-Snell
and Shawnthea Monroe
Fortress, 200 pp., \$22.00 paperback

What ought to be the relationship between the church and the academy? Does professional theology matter for congregational life, and vice versa? What do preachers and professors have to say to each other?

These questions are at the heart of *Living Christianity*, a collaborative effort by an Ivy League professor and a mainline pastor. Shannon Craigo-Snell and Shawnthea Monroe take up the subjects of creation, Christ, sin, church and heaven, treating them historically and homiletically, theologically and pastorally, noting their significance for lived discipleship in the church and the world.

Craigo-Snell, who teaches religious studies at Yale, wears her scholarship lightly as she skillfully elucidates classic Christian teaching, drawing on thinkers as diverse as Hans Frei, Karl Rahner, St. Anselm and Delores Williams. Monroe, senior pastor of Plymouth Church of Shaker Heights in Ohio, displays a seasoned preacher's wit and wisdom as she locates doctrine's rightful home in the messiness of Christian communities struggling, and sometimes succeeding, to be faithful.

Both authors bring their individual gifts to the discussion. The book reads much like a conversation between friends; Craigo-Snell and Monroe have

known each other since they were seminary classmates in the mid-1990s. The authors are comfortable crossing the often strictly regulated church-academy divide: Craigo-Snell frames her discussion of ecclesiology with her honest reflections and reservations about real-world congregations; in the same chapter, Monroe ably tackles Karl Barth's interpretation of the four marks of the church.

Living Christianity is written for pastors, theologians and laypeople. Persons in this last group have the most to gain, as the authors aim to foster the practice of thinking theologically.

For instance, in the chapter on creation, tired arguments about creationism and evolution are shown to be much less interesting than a view of scripture in which "the meaning of the text is inseparable from the stories themselves." Similarly, the authors note that sin is a theological category—not a universal descriptor—because of the priority of God's grace. And they treat Christology not merely as a set of propositions about Jesus' life and work but as a living doctrine that "does not stand in isolation, but affects every other aspect of faith."

In the final chapter, on heaven, the authors deviate from their pattern of writing alternating sections and instead answer questions from members of Monroe's United Church of Christ congregation. The questions are poignant and reveal what most churchgoers really want to know about life after death: "What do we do in heaven?" "Do we become angels?" "How good do I have to be to get to heaven?" "Will I recognize my sister who died in infancy?"



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Craig-Snell relies heavily on Rahner's theology in her responses. (One wonders why there's no mention of N. T. Wright's 2008 book on heaven, *Surprised by Hope*.) And Monroe, not surprisingly, draws on her pastoral experience of counseling the grieving. When Craig-Snell seeks to refute the commonly held view that deceased loved ones become angels in heaven, Monroe counters with the claim that a conversation with a grief-stricken mother is not an occasion for lessons in theological orthodoxy. True enough. But the questions, answers and authors' exchanges are instructive for what they reveal about the challenges of long-term catechesis—about whether and how congregations can shape people who can articulate the faith that the church confesses.

There are a few missteps along the way. Some are in the form of oddly phrased observations like this one on the purpose of systematic theology: "It is learning how to weave your own theology," which, according to Craig-Snell, should "vary with each individual." Or this from Mon-

roe on the importance of understanding who Jesus Christ is: "The key is to become Christologically self-aware. For if we understand our particular Christology, then we can craft ways of worshipping and living that are coherent with our beliefs." These pronouncements seem out of place, inconsistent with the theological commitments that inform the authors' other views on their wide-ranging subjects. Indeed, they represent the kind of sloppy, liberal church-speak that this book seems designed, at least in part, to address.

An interesting inclusion in the book, which may also be something of a liability, is Craig-Snell's use of performance studies and the writing of theater director and scholar Peter Brook (*The Empty Space*) in her discussion of ecclesiology. The problem is not with Craig-Snell's analysis; the connections she makes between theater and church are compelling and worthy of deeper scrutiny. But it's a complex analogy she explores ("Representation is the way out of the trap of repetition, for representation constantly 'makes present,'

denying time by making meanings of the past immediate again"); treating it in a few pages in a single chapter may create more confusion than clarity, especially for readers trying to navigate the already troubled waters of 21st-century ecclesiology.

The book's greatest strength is its witness to the joy of friendship rooted in a shared love of God and the church. Craig-Snell and Monroe reveal the personal and professional rewards of attending to friendship through numerous life transitions and in spite of the obstacles of distance and time: each is better at what she does because of the other. And their book reminds us that friends not only enrich our lives, they make discipleship—the journey of living Christianity in and for the world—possible.

Reviewed by Debra Dean Murphy, assistant professor of religion at West Virginia Wesleyan College and the author of Teaching That Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education (Wipf and Stock). She blogs at Intersections: Thoughts on Religion, Culture, and Politics.

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BookMarks

Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption

By Laura Hillenbrand
Random House, 496 pp., \$27.00

Hillenbrand calls the life of Louie Zamperini, the subject of her new biography, "incomprehensibly dramatic." A record-breaking high school track star, competitor at the 1936 Berlin Olympics (where he played pranks on both Jesse Owens and the Nazi government) and WWII Army Air Corps bombardier, he saw months of fierce combat before his B-24 crashed at sea. After fending off starvation and shark attacks for 47 days in an ill-equipped raft, he was captured and imprisoned for years by the Japanese. This impeccably researched account of his journey through glory and suffering is as heart-wrenching as it is exultant.

The Alchemist: A Graphic Novel

By Paulo Coelho

Adapted by Derek Ruiz,

Artwork by Daniel Sampere

HarperOne, 208 pp., \$22.99

The classic tale of Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd who journeys to Egypt to find the "Soul of the World," has been adapted as a graphic novel for the first time. Written like a fable, *The Alchemist* is built around the conversations Santiago has with those he meets on his journey. Stripped of Coelho's descriptions, the graphic novel relies heavily on finely rendered portraiture to convey the nuances of these dialogues, backed by the epic landscapes of Santiago's travels. The result is a beautiful book that must be read with careful attention in order to match the emotional impact of the original.

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The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader

Directed by Michael Apted
Starring Georgie Henley, Skandar Keynes,
Will Poulter, Ben Barnes and Liam Neeson

The third installment in the film adaptation of C. S. Lewis's beloved series of children's parables features a new director. The veteran Michael Apted takes over from Andrew Adamson, who made the splendid films of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian*. The good news is that *Dawn Treader* is a worthy successor to Adamson's entries.

The opening half hour, though, is a little disappointing. Keeping to the convention established in the first film, the setting is the Second World War. (Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely, who worked on the screenplays for both the other Narnia pictures, collaborate here with Michael Petroni.) The two oldest Pevensies, Peter and Susan, have moved to Cambridge with their father, while Edmund (Skandar Keynes) and Lucy (Georgie Henley) are stuck at their aunt's, where they have to put up with their officious, whining cousin Eustace (Will Poulter).

The three children are called to Narnia when a ship in a painting comes alive. It turns out to be the *Dawn Treader*, captained by the Pevensies' old comrade Prince Caspian (Ben Barnes), on a quest to find seven lords who never returned after being dispatched by Caspian's late father to the far islands. Apted's too-broad direction of the early episodes gives rein to Poulter's tendency toward mugging, and the scene on the first island they visit, in which pirates attempt to sell Caspian and the others into slavery, is both unimaginative and clumsy.

But on their second stop, when Lucy is



FACING TEMPTATION: A magical Narnian snowfall envelops Lucy Pevensie (Georgie Henley) as she is lured by the power in a magician's book of spells.

blackmailed by a team of invisible adversaries into entering an enchanted mansion to locate a magician's spell book (so they can become visible again), the movie takes off, both visually and emotionally.

Perusing the volume for the requested charm, Lucy is waylaid by another volume that promises beauty; the book is transformed into a mirror, and the face that stares back at her is that of her older sister Susan (Anna Popplewell), whose elegant looks she has always envied. She tears out the page and later recites the charm, finding herself transported to an alternate reality where there is no Lucy—and no Narnia either. After all, as the Christlike lion Aslan (voiced by Liam Neeson) points out (after rescuing her), it was Lucy who first brought the Pevensie children into the world of Narnia, when it was still under the power of the cruel White Witch.

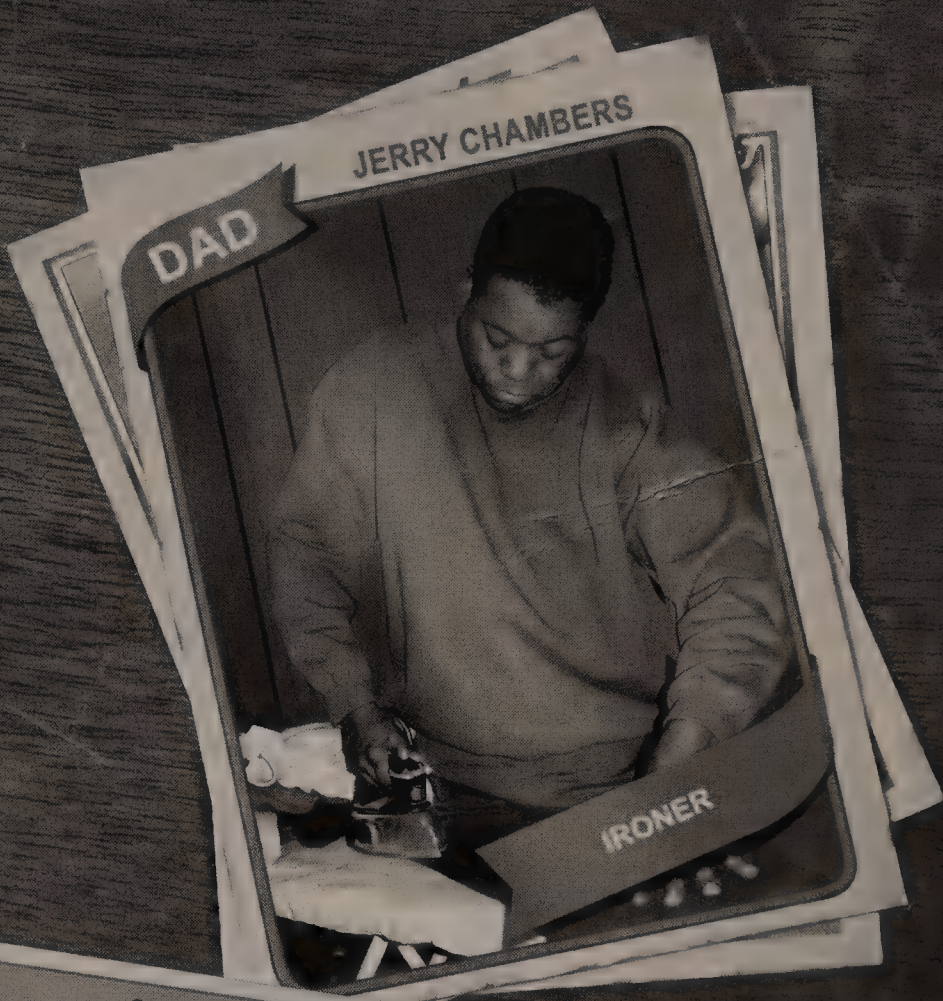
The movie is a kind of juvenile rendition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, with Caspian and the children encountering one temptation after another. Edmund and Caspian find a lake that turns everything that touches its surface into gold, and greed and lust for power set them immediately against each other. Eustace's selfishness traps him when he stumbles upon a valley stocked with treasure and, placing a gold band around his arm, finds himself turned into a dragon. (Fans of the

book may miss the melancholy detail of the dying dragon who has hoarded the treasure and is actually one of the vanished lords, doomed by his own greed.)

The dragon has skin like ancient brass, accordion wings and wide, anguished eyes; the image of it pulling the magnificent ship across the water makes you grin. In a particularly wondrous scene we see Aslan (at his second entrance) reflected in one of the dragon's immense eyes. There are other visual treats, too: the overgrown, woodsy cliffs that frame one of the islands, a sea serpent that embodies Edmund's worst nightmare.

Legendary cinematographer Dante Spinotti plays over the surface of the ocean and the horizon line with rainbows of refracted light; even in the shipboard scenes, which are mostly conduits from one adventure to the next, there's not any doubt that we're in a place of profound enchantment. A place of intense feeling, too; the film ends, as the novel does, with a series of poignant farewells that simultaneously acknowledge the twilight of childhood and the approach of death. Like their source material, the Narnia movies embrace the darkness as well as the light.

Reviewed by Steve Vineberg, who teaches at the College of the Holy Cross.





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2000	285	123	415	142	137	161	372	.299
2001	335	104	397	134	114	154	391	.574
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by Rodney Clapp

American SOUNDINGS

Religion book beat

In my capacity as an editor for Baker Academic and Brazos Press, I annually attend the meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature. These conferences always provide occasion for reflection on current trends in theology and biblical studies. My major impression after the meetings held this past November was that there is a lack of any large-scale movements or trends in the theological academy. Beginning in the 1980s, biblical studies saw a massive output of work on Jesus of Nazareth—what is known as the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus. And in the late 1990s, Radical Orthodoxy enlivened several packed sessions at the AAR. But nothing that is happening now is remotely on the scale of those developments.

A biblical scholar remarked to me that “biblical criticism is exhausted.” But scholars continue to search for what lies after it. Theology, meanwhile, seems to have broken into a wide variety of subfields with no one school of thought dominant. People seem reluctant to identify, let alone jump on, any particular bandwagon.

But one major formal development is worth noting. I mention it gingerly, because of what may be construed as a conflict of interest on my part. Though denominational and university presses continue to publish copious and important work, the center of gravity in publishing has

arguably shifted to houses with evangelical bases or connections. The conspicuously large bookselling booths, and presumably concomitantly robust sales, now belong to Eerdmans, InterVarsity Press, Baylor University Press and Baker Academic and Brazos Press.

Some academics view this development as a cause for alarm, resorting to the f-word, fundamentalism. But such names as N. T. Wright, Miloslav Volf, Richard Hays, David Gushee, Peter Leithart and James K. A. Smith need only be mentioned to dispel arguments that evangelicalism, broadly conceived, lacks sophisticated and rigorous thinkers.

Whatever large trends are occurring, certain issues and topics stood out in book exhibits and conversations. For example, there is a revival of interest in the writings of the apostle Paul. As global capitalism continues its turbulent reign and as most forms of working communism have died out, Marxist and post-Marxist thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben and Alain Badiou find in Paul various grounds for resistance. Of course, these authors approach Paul on thoroughly materialist, nonsupernaturalist terms, so there is much for theologians and biblical scholars to debate about the new claims laid on Paul.

In a very different realm of discourse, that of conservative evangelicalism, books are brewing on evolution and the historicity of Adam (and Eve). These books will challenge Adam’s historicity, putting forth categories other than history to designate Adam’s status. Such arguments are passé for mainline scholars, but one stalwart evangelical scholar predicted hot and heavy fighting to come on the subject within conservative evangelicalism.

Many books are taking up the topic of religion and race. Duke Divinity School houses three scholars who have published significant books in that field, all based in both generous Christian orthodoxy and savvy appraisals of critical theory: Willie Jennings’s *The Christian Imagination*, J. Kameron Carter’s *Race: A Theological Account* and Brian Bantum’s *Redeeming Mulatto*.

I also noted a number of books on the afterlife. Continuum Press sold out its copies of Christopher Morse’s *The Difference Heaven Makes* within the first few hours of the opening of the AAR exhibits. As the baby-boomer cohort ages and many now enter their twilight years, I suspect we will see more and more books on what lies beyond death.

Relatedly, there is much talk

about apocalyptic thought and literature—exactly what it is and isn’t, how it may be appropriated for contemporary concerns, and whether or not the interest in it is salutary. Scholars are reworking ground earlier tilled by the New Testament scholar J. Louis Martyn. And young, provocative thinkers such as Nathan Kerr are employing the category of apocalyptic to check what they view as an overvaluation of the church that puts it on par with the revelation of Jesus Christ. Much of the discussion around Kerr’s thesis is already taking place online among theological bloggers.

Blogging itself was the topic of considerable conversation at the meetings. Not a few scholars are wary of blogging, especially with its lack of any clear gates or gatekeepers. As an editor and someone who is therefore a gatekeeper by definition, I share their concerns.

At the same time, I’m struck by the high level of discourse on such blogs as Ben Myers’s *Faith and Theology*, Halden Doerge’s *Inhabitation Dei* and Adam Kotsko’s *An und für sich*. In effect, the first drafts of forthcoming books are being written in the blogosphere. What you may read tomorrow in print, between covers, you may find today in half a dozen or so significant blogs.

Rodney Clapp’s *Soundings* column appears in every other issue.

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SATAN AND THE MILLIONAIRE—*The Price*, by Leon Newton, is a one-act play about an arrogant millionaire in hell who thinks his paperwork got mixed up and he is not supposed to be there. Available on Amazon.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Valparaiso University seeks an ELCA pastor with 5+ years' experience to serve as one of two UNIVERSITY PASTORS. For position description and how to nominate or apply, see: www.valpo.edu/hr.

The Presbyterian Association of Musicians (PAM) is commencing a search for an EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR to begin duties December 1, 2011, or January 1, 2012. The person accepting the call to this position will serve as chief executive officer for PAM and its executive board. The executive director will be responsible for the implementation of policies set by the board as well as its annual goals, objectives and financial program and the administrative management of PAM. The executive director will work from the National Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), located in Louisville, KY, and will oversee staff. Successful candidates will demonstrate proven leadership skills, financial skills and interpersonal skills, as well as a solid grounding in Reformed theology, worship and music. The capacity to be an effective advocate and ambassador for the organization and its members is essential. Salary will be commensurate with experience, including benefits as guided by the Presbyterian Board of Pensions. The job description can be found on the PAM website presbysmusic.org/execdir.html. Please send, electronically, a letter of interest, a C.V. and a reference list (minimum of three references) to the PAM ED Search Committee at: apply@presbysmusic.org by March 31, 2011. The Presbyterian Association of Musicians is an equal-opportunity employer.

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The University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, a seminary of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), is seeking a faculty member in CHURCH HISTORY or HISTORICAL THEOLOGY to begin teaching in August 2011. Applicants are expected to have a vibrant commitment to Jesus Christ and the church and an appreciation of the Reformed theological tradition. Successful candidates will be able to teach introductory courses in both history of Christianity and Christian doctrine as well as advanced courses in Reformed history and theology. M.Div. or equivalent and ABD or Ph.D. or equivalent in history or historical theology is required. Pastoral experience is preferred. Candidates will be expected to teach in the residential and distance programs of the seminary. This is a new, long-term appointment that may become tenure track. Application deadline is January 21, 2011. Applicants should send a curriculum vitae, academic transcripts and three letters of reference to: Human Resources, University of Dubuque, 2000 University Ave., Dubuque, IA 52001. Women and minority candidates are encouraged to apply.

The Indiana Kentucky Conference of the United Church of Christ is searching for a CONFERENCE MINISTER with energy and forward-looking leadership skills to challenge membership to vital participation in the life of the church. Please visit www.ikcucc.org to find the conference profile and application.

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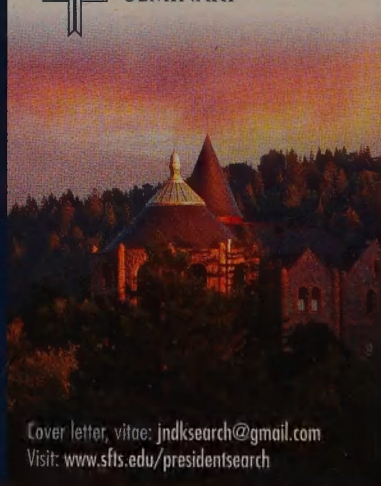
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Arcosanti, by Brendon Purdy

Times of transition, as seen in Brendon Purdy's *Arcosanti*, are potent times. It's no wonder that dawn and dusk are traditional times of prayer and devotion. Amid the grainy textures of cloud, land and people, the tiny point of the moon sets the cosmological context. Time-lapse photography has captured traces of the movements of the people, expanding our sense of time from "this moment" into "all moments." Based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Purdy travels widely and says his "greatest hope as a photographer is to capture something beneath the obvious, such as grace, nobility, humanity or wonder."

—Lois Huey-Heck

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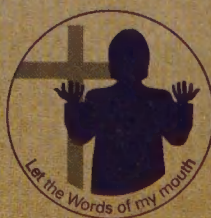
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